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King receives cables on 31st anniversary of Karameh Battle

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Saturday received cables on the 31st anniversary of the Karameh Battle. In their cables, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Mira'i Kaabneh, Public Security Department Director General Nasouh Muhieddin, and Civil Defence Department Director General Theeb Maani expressed their pride in the Hashemite leadership. They remembered the sacrifices of the late King Hussein in defending Jordan and said King Abdullah's leadership is a continuation of the Hashemite tradition.

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Government plans to amend press law

AMMAN (AP) — The government is looking to amend a controversial press law to fulfil its pledge to give the public wider freedoms, Prime Minister Abdul-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh said Saturday. Rawabdeh said he was working under instructions from His Majesty King Abdullah to alter the restrictive press law, which was enacted in August under the previous Cabinet. "We will try to reach with the media a compromise, draft press and publications bill that will consolidate freedoms," Rawabdeh told reporters after a Cabinet session presided over by King Abdullah. The draft law will be presented to Parliament for endorsement soon, said Rawabdeh, who took office on March 4. The current press law has been widely criticised as restricting public freedoms because it limits the flow of information and forces journalists to censor themselves.

Public offices closed March 27-30 for 'Eid

AMMAN (Petra) — All ministries and public departments will be closed March 27-30 in observance of the 'Eid Al Adha holidays, a communiqué issued by Prime Minister Abdul-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh said on Saturday. Offices will reopen on March 31.

First Arab PM candidate prepares for Israeli polls

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM (AFP) — An Arab-Israeli party, the National Democratic Alliance, or Bilad, launched a campaign on Saturday to gather signatures necessary to put forward its leader in the race for Israeli prime minister. Bilad's Azmi Beshara, a deputy in the outgoing Knesset, will become the first Arab to run for the office of prime minister if he gains the necessary signatures and decides to run in the May 17 poll. Bilad, which only has a few hundred members, has not yet decided if Beshara will eventually stand but says it wants to keep its options open.

Bomb targeting N. Irish anti-violence group defused

BELFAST (AFP) — A homemade bomb planted near the southern Belfast home of a spokesman for a group fighting violence in Northern Ireland was defused Saturday. The group, Families Against Intimidation and Terror, said the bomb was planted on a house door of their spokesman Vincent McKenna, a former member of the paramilitary Irish Republican Army, which he accused of being behind the attack. "I have no doubt it was the members of the IRA who planted this bomb," McKenna said. "I've been threatened twice in the past two weeks but it will not stop me from speaking out against violence," he said. McKenna's group regularly condemns "punishment beatings" by Catholic and Protestant paramilitaries against members of their own communities and keeps a tally of those killed or injured in such attacks, aimed at drugs offenders or those who question paramilitary authority.

Airliner makes emergency landing

GENEVA (AFP) — An Iberia airliner carrying 101 passengers made an emergency landing at Geneva airport Saturday due to the blockage of landing gear in the nose. Emergency services laid down a layer of foam on the runway, and the MD-80 aircraft, on a flight from Barcelona, landed safely with no injuries reported. The airport was closed for several hours while the sole runway was cleared but reopened around 4 p.m. local time. Flights were shifted to Swiss airports at Basel and Zurich or to Lyon, in France.

Two dead as leftist Colombian rebels storm town

BOGOTA (AFP) — A police officer and a civilian died when 200 leftist rebels attacked a southwestern Colombian town late Friday, an army spokesman reported here. Rebels from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC) used explosives and heavy automatic weapons fire in their attack on the town of Dagua, some 300 kilometres southwest of Bogota, the army spokesman said. Aside from the two dead, three police officers, two soldiers and two women were injured. During the attack the rebels heavily damaged the town's police headquarters, two banks, a federal office and the state phone company offices.

King holds talks with Musa, Abu Mazen Jordan, Egypt back Palestinian right to declare independent state

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — Jordan and Egypt on Saturday stood firm in supporting the Palestinian National Authority in its right to declare a Palestinian state, three days ahead of crucial talks at the White House between PNA leader Yasser Arafat and U.S. President Bill Clinton.

The unwavering moral and political support came in a joint communiqué following a tripartite meeting convened by the foreign ministers of Jordan and Egypt, Abdul Ilah Khatib and Amr Musa, as well as chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat.

The meeting was also attended by the PLO's number two, Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen).

His Majesty King Abdullah later received Musa and Abu Mazen in separate meetings, then held talks with both of them at the Royal Court.

"The King stressed the need to lay down 'a tripartite joint strategy' in order to face up to the challenges of final status talks between Israel and the PNA."

"There is a need for concerted coordination amongst the three parties to ensure the commitments" by Israel to the interim phase accords, scheduled to end by May 4, King Abdullah said.

Musa said that he delivered a message from President Hosni Mubarak to King Abdullah.



His Majesty King Abdullah confers Saturday with Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Musa, Mahmoud Abbas, senior aide to Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat at the Royal Palace (Photo by Yousef 'Allan)

Both leaders met Tuesday in Aqaba and the Egyptian Red Sea resort of Taba, just a week after Arafat held talks separately with both of them in Amman and Cairo.

Musa denied reports that Jordan and Egypt were seeking to coerce Arafat into postponing the declaration of a Palestinian state. "There is no such Arab

pressure on the PNA with regard to May 4," Musa told reporters following the tripartite meeting. "The decision on the timing lies in the hands of Arafat, and we will support him."

The United States and Europe are trying to persuade Arafat to postpone the projected declaration until after the Israeli elections, slated for May 17.

Arafat is now in Greece as part of a European tour

which includes a stopover in Paris on the eve of his scheduled talks in Washington.

On Tuesday, Musa left the door open for speculation as to the date of the final declaration.

"The Palestinian state is a strategic goal. But as for the timing, it is a tactical issue," he told reporters following talks in Aqaba between King Abdullah and Mubarak.

(Continued on page 2)

King asks government to finalise draft amnesty law

By a Staff Reporter

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah on Saturday asked the government to draft a law offering a general amnesty. Also yesterday, the King ordered the immediate release of 12 out of 14 Muslim Brotherhood detainees being investigated for security-related matters.

After a Cabinet session chaired by the King, Prime Minister Abdul-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh told reporters that the Cabinet has prepared and approved a draft amnesty law that will be submitted to the Lower House for approval. "We hope that Parliament

will endorse the draft law before the 'Eid Al Adha' on March 27, Rawabdeh said. Agency France Presse news agency quoted an official as saying that the amnesty will not include those convicted of espionage, drug trafficking and murder.

The Lower House is expected to review the draft law during its session today.

The release of the 12 Islamists comes after a meeting between King Abdullah and Muslim Brotherhood leader Abdul Majeed Thneibat on Thursday.

Some of the 12 detainees were released on Saturday while others are expected to be

released today. Brotherhood sources said.

The secretary general of the Islamic Action Front, Abdul Latif Arabiyat, told the Jordan Times that among those who were detained by the authorities were IAF Shura Council members Ahmad Abu Sa'adah and Ja'afar Hourani.

"Most of those who were detained had been held since Feb. 2 and were interrogated by the authorities," Arabiyat said.

Abu Sa'adah, who was released on Saturday, said he was arrested along with other activists for alleged connections with the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas.

Iraqi pilgrims leave, snub Saudi offer

AR'AR (AFP) — Some 18,000 Iraqi Muslim pilgrims returned to Iraq on Saturday, snubbing an offer from Saudi King Fahd to finance their pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi officials said.

Saudi Interior Minister Prince Nayef Ben Abdul Aziz accused Baghdad of ordering the pilgrims' return and "exploiting" the pilgrimage for political ends.

"All the Iraqi pilgrims have gone back and crossed the border to their country," Ahmad Shamoun, director of a pilgrimage camp at the border post of Ar'ar, told AFP. He said they turned down an offer from King Fahd to pay the costs of the pilgrimage to Mecca, in western Saudi Arabia, amid a dispute between Iraq and the United Nations over finances.

The pilgrims insisted on a payment of \$2,000 each from their own government, to be released from a U.N. escrow account for the oil revenues of sanctions-hit Iraq, he said.

An official at the border, asking not to be named, had said

earlier that "if they refuse to leave for Mecca, Saudi authorities will be forced to send them back to Iraq."

In Mecca itself, Prince Nayef said: "Unfortunately, the Iraqi authorities ordered the pilgrims to go back to Iraq, and I would like to express the regrets of King Fahd and the Saudi government for this behaviour. 'I assure our brother pilgrims who have been taken back to Iraq that we deplore the fact the pilgrimage has been exploited for political ends,' he told reporters.

"Public opinion in the entire world will denounce this behaviour of the Iraqi authorities," he said, adding that "our doors are open to any Muslim who would like to make the pilgrimage."

State radio in Baghdad, meanwhile, said that "Iraqi pilgrims are flocking to Mecca." It apparently referred to some 4,000 pilgrims who set off earlier for the Holy City.

The 18,000 pilgrims on the border had crossed to Saudi Arabia on Friday after a two-day wait on the Iraqi side, as

King Fahd offered to pay for their expenses, accommodation and transport.

The official Iraqi press kept a total silence on the offer.

The build-up of pilgrims at the desert border post was seen as a bid to press the United Nations into releasing funds from U.N.-supervised Iraqi oil revenues to finance the pilgrimage.

Iraq has refused to accept a U.N. compromise offer to send the money through a third party such as the Red Cross and demanded that \$44 million be deposited in its own central bank.

On Friday, shortly after their crossing, the pilgrims held a demonstration shouting slogans in support of Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, witnesses said. They fell silent as the Saudi National Guard and anti-riot police neared.

The camp — used by all pilgrims who enter Saudi Arabia by road from Iraq for the annual pilgrimage known as the Haj — was circled by Saudi forces before the Iraqis left on Saturday.

Immediate action needed to develop country's water resources — King

By Ahmad Khatib

AMMAN — His Majesty King Abdullah on Saturday said immediate actions must be taken to set up short- and long-term solutions to develop water resources and ration consumption in order to help fend off Jordan's chronic water shortage, "the most pressing national issue."

King Abdullah urged the Cabinet during a session yesterday to inform him immediately about any problems it faces rather than concealing them and allowing them to grow.

At the session, held primarily to discuss the country's current water situation, the King was briefed on the government's "scenarios" to cope with the shortage.

Following the two-hour meeting, Prime Minister Abdul-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh told reporters that "the rationing measures, alternative solutions and requirements to deal with the water issue will be revealed to the public on May 1, and we are prepared to face any situation."

"The measures, which will avert a water crisis, will not solve the problem but will mitigate it in a manner that will make water supplies, especially drinking water, sufficient this summer," the premier said, without giving any further details about the plan. "Good citizens will cooperate with us to overcome these critical

moments when they believe that such steps are clear and have been taken for their benefit."

Officials have said the plan will include taking control of 1,654 privately-owned wells and limiting domestic water supplies, and that they might introduce drastic measures to limit agricultural production to less water-intensive crops.

They added that King Abdullah's chairing of the Cabinet meeting aimed at lending full support as the government embarks on carrying out the challenging mission, which could face objections from influential figures.

The Water Authority said it would reduce the amount of water pumped to the Southern Ghor region for agricultural use by 50 per cent, to the Northern Ghor by 20 per cent and to the Central Ghor by 10 per cent.

At present, around 650 million cubic metres of water per year are used for agriculture, part of which is non-renewable, according to water experts.

The Interior Ministry, backed by security agencies it looks after, would be responsible for ensuring control over private wells, whose owners are allegedly exploiting an estimated 320 million cubic metres of water annually. Most of them are paying a fraction of the cost of water they extract in practices that have continued unabated for years.

By the year 2000, Jordan's population, growing at around 3.5 per cent annually, will require 1,257 million cubic metres of water to cover minimum needs while resources will be capable of supplying only 960 million cubic metres.

Asked about recent developments in talks with Israel after the Jewish state requested a 40 per cent cut of water supplies to Jordan under the 1994 peace treaty because of a regional drought, Rawabdeh once again stressed the Kingdom's rightful water share and said: "We are not negotiating with them, as we insist on obtaining our full and legitimate water shares."

Under the peace treaty, Israel extracts 120mcm of water from the Yarmouk River in summer, and Jordan takes the rest. In winter, Israel gets 33mcm from the river, of which 20mcm are stored for Jordan in Lake Tiberias for the Kingdom's use in summer.

According to the treaty, Jordan and Israel should cooperate to supply the Kingdom with an additional quantity of 50mcm of drinkable water every year.

Meanwhile, former Water Minister Munther Haddadin accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of using the water problem with Jordan to achieve political goals.

Haddadin told the BBC that Netanyahu "wants to win people's votes, especially farmers, for his elections."



Bertrand Piccard (L) of Switzerland and Brian Jones of Great Britain pose for the media in front of the gondola of their Breitling Orbiter III balloon in Chateau d'Oex on Feb. 28. Piccard and Jones on Saturday became the first men ever to fly around the world non-stop in a hot-air balloon, mission spokesman Steve Axtentis said (Reuters photo)

Around the world in 19 days for record-setting balloonists

GENEVA (AFP) — Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones flew into the record books Saturday, becoming the first balloonists to travel non-stop around the world in an epic voyage that took 19 days, one hour and 49 minutes.

Breitling Orbiter III, their giant silver balloon, as tall as a 20-storey building, crossed 9.27 degrees west longitude over the Western Sahara at 0954 GMT Saturday after covering 42,810 kilometres.

Pilot Piccard, 41, of Switzerland and his co-pilot Jones, 51, of Britain, set off on March 1 from Chateau d'Oex in the Swiss Alps and harnessed high-altitude jet streams to power their bid.

As the ground control team in Geneva cracked open bottles of champagne, Jones, asked how he was planning to celebrate, said: "I am going to tell my wife I love her and then I'm going to have a cup of tea."

A delighted Piccard told ground control: "We are very grateful to the invisible hand which has guided us."

"We are not just flying on our own but with the backing of a fantastic team. All of a sudden I asked myself, why are we the ones to succeed? We had a great team. It was us against nature and it was great knowing we had that support."

Flight director Alan Noble said he expected the balloon to land in Egypt early Sunday, although a dramatic landing at the Pyramids near Cairo has been ruled out because of high winds in the area.

Piccard's wife Michelle and their three daughters, aged nine, six and four, boarded a special flight from Geneva to Egypt on Saturday.

"He's been preparing for four years and like all dreams, we feared it would stay only in his mind," Michelle said. Piccard's first two attempts at the

record ended in failure.

Jones's wife Joanna, a qualified balloonist herself, spent most of the 19 days with the Geneva control team.

The pilots thanked the thousands of well-wishers who sent messages via the Internet and ground control. "The messages kept us going. It was great knowing that everyone was behind us," Jones said.

The achievement of Piccard and Jones dashed the dreams of a clutch of other international rivals after 17 or so failed attempts at the round-the-world record.

British tycoon Richard Branson one of many balloonists to fail the challenge said: "It is a magnificent achievement and two delightful people have achieved it and we look forward to going to Switzerland to celebrate it with them tomorrow [Sunday]."

(Continued on page 2)

'Princess Rania to be named Queen soon'

By Caroline Faraj

AMMAN — A Royal Decree naming HRH Princess Rania as Queen is imminent, a senior official indicated on Saturday.

The official, Royal Court Chief Abdul Karim Kabarti, told the Jordan Times at the Prime Ministry following a Cabinet session chaired by His Majesty King Abdullah yesterday that "Their Majesties King Abdullah and Queen Rania will receive the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani in Aqaba on Tuesday."

Kabarti was the first senior official to refer to Princess Rania as Queen.

The news was confirmed by a Cabinet minister, who declined to provide details.

It was not clear whether a coronation ceremony for King Abdullah and Queen Rania would take place after the end of the three-month mourning period observed by the Royal Court.

King Abdullah ascended the Throne on Feb. 7, following the death of King Hussein.

Princess Rania was born Rania Yasin to Faisal and Itham Yasin in Kuwait in 1970. She obtained a BA in Business Administration from the American University of Cairo in 1991.

On June 10, 1993, Princess Rania married then Prince Abdullah.

The couple have two children, Prince Hussein, four, and Princess Inan, two.

Palestinians say Israeli moves will spark violence

RAMALLAH (R) — The Palestinian National Authority (PNA) said on Saturday it would not be able to curb future street protests by Palestinians upset by Israel's continued refusal to implement peace deals.

Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's senior aide Tayeb Abdul Rahim said Israeli measures including continued confiscation of Arab land were putting the PNA's credibility at risk.

"The right-wing government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is making every effort to kill peace," Abdul Rahim said.

"Despite the Israeli measures, the Palestinian National Authority was able

to exercise self-restraint and patience out of a desire to give the sponsors of the peace process a last chance to pressure Israel to carry out its obligations," he told a conference organised by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"But the Palestinian Authority will not be able to continue containing popular frustration, despair, and anger towards Israel if this Israeli government continues confiscating land, and suffocating Palestinians economically and continues rejecting implementation of peace deals," he said.

Netanyahu suspended a U.S.-brokered land-for-security deal late last year

over alleged Palestinian violations. Washington has defended the Palestinians' record of compliance with their security obligations under the Wye accord signed in October.

Netanyahu's policies have led to bloodshed between Israelis and Palestinians. In September 1996, 57 Palestinian policemen and 15 Israeli soldiers were killed after he opened an archaeological tunnel near Muslim shrines in Arab east Jerusalem.

Palestinians regard Arab east Jerusalem as the capital of a future state. Israel occupied it in the 1967 war, declaring it part of its indivisible, "eternal" capital.

Palestinian officials said the crackdown by Palesti-

an police on militant Islamist groups who oppose peace with Israel, coupled with Israeli-imposed closures over self-ruled areas, and the continued confiscation of Palestinian land for Jewish settlement building has fuelled street frustration. Popular anger has at times been directed at the PNA, which began to lose credibility among its people for continuing to implement obligations under deals without Israeli reciprocity, they said.

Earlier this month, two Palestinians were killed and scores injured in the Gaza Strip in unrest sparked by a military court decision to pass a death sentence on a man convicted of killing a policeman.



FATEH MARKS SLAYING OF MEMBERS: A member of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's Fateh movement adjusts Saturday a Palestinian flag over pictures of the group's militants who were killed by Israeli troops six years ago in Jabalia camp in Gaza Strip during a rally held in Gaza City to mark the sixth anniversary of their death (AFP photo)

Police occupy pro-PKK party HQ

ISTANBUL (AFP) — Turkish police detained hundreds of Kurds for questioning Saturday following a raid on the provincial headquarters here of the pro-Kurdish People's Democracy Party (HDP), sources said.

The news agency Anadolu said hundreds of people had been taken into custody at the HDP premises and at the pro-Kurdish Mesopotamia Cultural Centre as part of security operations on the eve of the Kurdish festival of Newroz. Illegal documents were seized at the cultural centre, the agency also reported.

A spokesman for the Association for the Defence of Human Rights in Turkey

said a dummy bomb had been found outside its premises.

Police had cordoned off the area but the suspect package was found not to contain any explosives.

HDP is currently under threat of ban because of suspected links with the outlawed militant Kurdish Labour Party (PKK).

PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan was captured last month in hiding in Nairobi and brought back to Turkey where he is being held incommunicado on a prison island. Since he was seized, Turkey has been hit by a wave of bombing attacks which security authorities suspect were the work of the PKK.

At least 13 people have been killed and over 40 injured in attacks in Istanbul alone, a sprawling city of over 10 million on the Bosphorus Straits.

Ocalan will be tried on charges of treason in connection with the PKK's armed struggle since 1984 for Kurdish self-rule in southeastern Anatolia, which has claimed almost 31,000 lives.

Security has been strengthened during Newroz particularly in southeastern Turkey. Newroz is a feast of Zoroastrian origin, celebrating spring and the awakening of nature on March 21. The Kurds have turned the festival into a symbol of their

rebellion, but the Turkish state has also reclaimed it as a traditional New Year celebration. The authorities ban human rights activists and foreign correspondents from visiting southeastern Turkey every year during Newroz. A Belgian and two Dutch parliamentary deputies were prevented from going to Diyarbakir, the main town of southeastern Turkey, and returned home Saturday after being held by police Friday at Istanbul airport, the Human Rights Association reported.

Newroz celebrations have been banned this year at Diyarbakir because of the wave of assassinations following Ocalan's arrest.

Opposition boycotts leader over handshake

DAMASCUS (AFP) — Palestinian opposition groups based here boycotted a ceremony organised by one of the two biggest opposition movements to protest against a meeting between its leader and Israeli President Ezer Weizman.

The Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) was celebrating its 30th anniversary at a refugee camp just outside

Damascus. The movement is one of the three main members of the Palestine Liberation Organisation, but like other Damascus-based groups it rejects the Oslo peace process. DFLP leader Nayef Hawatmeh angered other members of the opposition when he shook hands with Weizman at the funeral of King Hussein in Amman in February. Hawatmeh played down

the significance of the encounter, saying it occurred by chance.

"The meeting was not the result of chance, but was certainly prepared," Khaled Fahum, former speaker of the Palestine National Council and leading member of the opposition, told AFP.

"I sent a message of congratulations to DFLP activists, but not to Hawatmeh, who has to apolo-

gise," he said. After his meeting with Weizman, Hawatmeh was ejected from a committee of opposition members set up to oppose the cancellation of articles in the Palestine National Charter offensive to Israel.

Other members of the Damascus-based rejectionist front include the Marxist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, Islamic Jihad and Hamas.

Jordan, Egypt back Palestinian right to declare state

(Continued from page 1)

Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'uf S. Rawabdeh, who also held talks with Musa and Abu Mazen, said Jordan would recognise a Palestinian state.

"Jordan backs its Palestinian brethren in their quest to declare an independent state. We will support the state when they decide to declare it," Rawabdeh told reporters following Saturday's meeting.

In their joint communiqué, read out by Foreign Minister Khatib, the three parties "called on all states to support the Palestinians' rights and recognise the independent Palestinian state as soon as it has been declared."

"Jordan, Egypt and the PNA underscore the right of the Palestinian leadership to

declare an independent state as stipulated in the terms of reference and peace accords."

While they reiterated "Arab commitment towards the peace process as a strategic choice to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict," the three parties blamed Israel for the impasse in the peace process.

They demanded that Israel "refrain from taking unilateral measures that could preempt the results of final status talks."

Israel should "also cease its illegal actions with regard to the Holy City of Jerusalem as well as all settlement activities, land confiscation and home demolitions," added the communiqué.

The three parties expressed "their support for the Syrian and Lebanese

stance, based on resuming the stalled peace negotiations with Israel from the point they reached," before they were frozen in March 1996.

They called for "Israeli withdrawal from Syrian land [the Golan Heights] and from south Lebanon as a prerequisite for a comprehensive peace."

While the communiqué underlined the U.S. "influential and active role emanating from its commitment to reaching a just and durable peace," the three parties hailed both "the European and Russian" roles in support of Palestinian rights.

The Jordanian, Egyptian and Palestinian officials agreed to pursue coordination on bilateral and trilateral levels with regard to the final status talks.

Jordan and Egypt, the only two Arab countries to have signed peace treaties with Israel, have vested interest in several thorny issues of final status talks, the statement said.

Topping the agenda are Arab east Jerusalem, borders and refugees. More than one-third of the 3.5 million Palestinian refugees live in 13 camps scattered about Jordan.

Musa said "the final statement reflects the beginning of our trilateral coordination in efforts" to jumpstart the peace process.

Erekat said the meeting in Amman reflected strong and solid Jordanian and Egyptian support for the Palestinians.

He noted that the Israeli stance is based on taking the Palestinians "tightly by neither respecting nor fulfilling

the written and signed commitments."

Erekat stressed that the May 4 target date has to be "respected by everybody... But the Palestinians decided to consult with their friends regarding this issue."

Still, he said, he expected the "entire Arab World to back any decision the Palestinians take regarding their state."

He said Arafat was misquoted on Friday by the press as threatening to use force if Israel sought to undermine the May 4 declaration.

"He did not say that, but he was only referring to [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu's attitude and the way he was threatening to take back the PNA territories" in the event of a declaration of a Palestinian state.

Balloonists complete first non-stop circumnavigation

(Continued from page 1)

Branson, who made four failed attempts at the record, said he was unlikely to have another go. "Most likely we'll bow out gracefully and call it a day."

Piccard and Jones will also collect \$1 million on offer since 1997 by U.S. brewery Anheuser-Busch to the first balloon crew to fly round-the-world before the end of the 20th century. Half the money will go to charity.

The Breiting Orbiter III also beat the record of 17 days, 18 hours and 25 minutes aloft, set on March 7 by British flyers Andy Elson and Colin Prescott before their balloon came

down in the Pacific.

In Lausanne, International Olympic Committee President Juan Antonio Samaranch said the pilots would be awarded the Olympic Order, while the Swiss postal service said it would issue a special postage stamp to mark the achievement.

Piccard, a psychiatrist, had earlier burst into tears when Belgian meteorologist Luc Trulleman told him the balloon was nearing its goal.

Jones, a ballooning instructor and grandfather of three, only joined Piccard after Tony Brown, another Briton, pulled out of the challenge at the last moment. Meanwhile, messages of

congratulations were pouring into mission control, among them one from Queen Elizabeth II.

"The news of your splendid achievement has delighted us all," a message from the queen read.

But despite the celebrations, the control team warned the landing would not necessarily be easy. The pilots are exhausted after their epic voyage during which they endured cold, altitude sickness and lived on rehydrated food.

Noble said the team would select a clear landing site and hoped there would not be a lot of wind. They also hoped to bring the balloon down in an area where a speedy pick-up for the pilots would be possible.

JORDAN TELEVISION

Tel. 4773111-19

PROGRAMME TWO

19:00 Le Journal
19:15 French Focus
19:30 News headlines
19:33 Faut Pas
Rever
20:30 Walker Texas Ranger
21:15 Divine Pledge
22:00 News in English
22:10 Mini-series - The Politician's wife (pt. of 2)

PRAYER TIMES

04:18 Fajr
05:35 (Sunrise) Doha
11:43 Dhuhr
15:10 'Asr
17:51 Maghreb
19:08 'Isha

CHURCHES

St. Mary of Nazareth Church
Sweifish, Tel. 5920740
Assemblies of God Church Tel.
4632785
St. Joseph Church Tel. 4624590
Terra Sancta Church Tel.
4622366
Anglican Church Tel.
4624853/4624811
St. Afrem Syrian Orthodox
Church Tel. 4771751
Amman International Church
Tel. 5865897
German-speaking Evangelical
Congregation Tel. 5688404
The Evangelical Local Church

JORDAN TIMES DAILY GUIDE AND CALENDAR

in Amman Tel. 5811295

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints Tel. 4654932

St. John the Baptist at De la Salle College Tel. 5661757

Church of the Annunciation Tel. 4637440

Greek Orthodox Church Tel. 4646138

Church of Presentation, Sweifish Tel. 5920146

The United Catholic Church Tel. 4624757

The English-Language Catholic Parish Tel. 4614190

Evangelical Free Church Tel. 4892679

The Baptist Church Tel. 4628052

The Armenian Catholic Church Tel. 4771331

The Armenian Orthodox Church Tel. 4775361

WEATHER

Bulletin supplied by the Department of Meteorology

Skies will be cloudy to partly cloudy, rainy at intervals, and winds westerly moderate to active. In Aqaba, it will be dusty, partly cloudy, rainy, winds northerly moderate, and seas choppy.

Min/Max temp.
Amman 06/15

Aqaba 11/26

Deserts 05/19

Jordan Valley 10/25

Yesterday's high temperatures:

Amman 16 Aqaba 26 Humidity

readings: Amman 66 per cent, Aqaba 33 per cent.

Following are the temperatures expected today in the following areas:

Ajloun 03/09

Jerash 06/15

Um Qays 07/17

Madaba 06/15

Petra 05/18

Dead Sea 11/25

USEFUL TELEPHONE NUMBERS NIGHT DUTY

AMMAN:

Dr. Farouq Nour 5601719

Dr. Abdul Hadi Tayyem 4620115

Dr. Wisam Hanyan 4748563

Dr. Mukhlis Mazarrah 5150312

AMMAN:

Firas Pharmacy 5661912

Al Salam Pharmacy 4636730

Mayadah Pharmacy 5537004

Raka Al Dawa Pharmacy 5536169

IRBID:

Dr. Issam Salih 021246858

Fou'ad Pharmacy (02)275360

ZARQA:

Dr. Mazen Saffarini (05)985832

Pain Relief Pharmacy (05)983562

EMERGENCIES

Food Control Centre 4637111

Civil Defence Department 5661111

Civil Defence Immediate Rescue 4630341

Civil Defence Emergency 199

Rescue Police 192, 4621111, 4637777

Fire Brigade 4617101

Blood Bank 4775121

Highway Police 5343402

Traffic Police 4896390

Public Security Dept. 4630321

Hotel Complaints 5605800

Price Complaints 5661176

Water & Sewage Complaints 489467

Amman Municipality Complaints 787111

Telephone Information (directory assistance) 121

Overseas Calls 0132

Central Amman Telephone Repairs 4623101

Abdali Tel. Repairs 5661101

Jordan Television 4773111

Radio Jordan 4774111

Water Authority 5680100

J. Electricity Authority 5815615

Electric Power Co. 4636381

RJ Flight Information 44-53200

Queen Alia Int. Airport 44-53200

HOSPITALS

AMMAN:

The Arab Centre for Heart and Special Surgery 5921199

The Islamic Abdi 5666131/7

Hussien Medical Centre 5856856

Luzmila 4630195

Khalidi Maternity 4644281/6

Akileh Maternity 4643411/2

Jabal Amman Maternity 4642362

Mahbas, J. Amman 4636140

Palestine, Shmeisani 5607071

Shmeisani Hospital 5607431

Jordan Hospital 5607550

University Hospital 5353444

Al-Muasher Hospital 566727/9

Al-Ahli, Abdali 5664164/6

Italian, Al-Mubajreen 4771101/3

Al-Bashir 4775111/26

Army, Marka 4891611/15

Queen Alia Hospital 5157100

Amal Hospital 5607155

Al Arsal Cancer Centre 5353000

Jerusalem Hospital 4387181

ZARQA:

Zarqa Govt. Hospital

Zarqa National Hospital

Ibn Sina Hospital (09)986731

Al Hikma Modern Hospital

IRBID:

Princess Basma Hospital

Roman Catholic Hospital

Ibn Al Nafes Hospital

Rosary Sisters Hospital

(02) 7102831, (02) 7102011

Specialty Hospital (02) 7103100

AQABA:

Princess Haya Hospital

(03)2014111

FOR THE TRAVELLER

QUEEN ALIA

INTERNATIONAL

AIRPORT

This information is supplied by

Royal Jordanian (RJ) information

department at the Queen Alia

International Airport Tel.

(44)53200 where it should always

be verified. Information on other

flights is obtained on telephone

(44) 52700 or (44) 523250. Informa-

tion on Royal Wings flights

can be supplied on phone

4875201-5

ARRIVALS

Royal Jordanian (RJ) Flights

07:00 Bangkok, Doha (RJ)

08:25 Bombay (RJ)

08:30 Jeddah (add) (RJ)

08:35 Jeddah (RJ)

08:50 Dhahran, Riyadh (RJ)

09:00 Beirut (RJ)



Health Ministry launches free polio vaccination campaign

AMMAN (Petra) — The Ministry of Health Saturday launched an anti-polio campaign, providing immunisation against the disease to children under the age of five in the Kingdom's governorates.

Health Minister Ishaq Maraga said the campaign, launched with support and assistance from the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), is providing the immunisation free of charge. He said the ministry has purchased the vaccines through the WHO and is taking extra precautions in guaranteeing the quality of the vaccine, which he said is kept under stringent monitoring and storage.

Speaking during a visit to the Princess Basma Health Centre in Amman where he oversaw the campaign's launch, the minister

appealed to parents of all children under five years of age to visit health centres with their children so that they can be vaccinated.

He said it is the duty of parents to ensure that their children get the right protection from the disease.

According to Maraga, the vaccination is being offered at government-run health centres, public hospitals, mother and childcare centres, the Jordan University Hospital, the health centres of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and the Jordan Armed Forces Royal Medical services.

He said these centres will provide the vaccines from eight in the morning until two in the afternoon.

Omar Suleiman, WHO regional representative in Amman, said in remarks at the start of the week-long campaign that it is of par-

mount importance, designed to fulfil WHO's target of worldwide polio eradication by the year 2000.

Commending Jordan's efforts in the fight against polio, Suleiman said Jordan is considered among the first group of nations to attain major achievements against polio. He predicted that Jordan will be among the first group of nations to declare the complete eradication of polio in view of the great strides the Kingdom has been taking to achieve that goal.

UNICEF representative Ayman Abu Laban said UNICEF will continue to assist the Ministry of Health in the fight against the disease, noting vaccine is provided in two doses.

Reports from the Kingdom's 12 governorates said the immunisation campaign was under way at the health centres and public hospitals.

Queen Noor visits child cancer victims at Al Amal Centre

AMMAN (J.T.) — Her Majesty Queen Noor on Saturday visited children undergoing cancer treatment at Al Amal Centre, Jordan University Hospital and the King Hussein Medical Centre.

Princess Iman accompanied the Queen and distributed presents to the children.

Queen Noor, who chairs the Board of Al Amal Cancer Centre, announced the establishment of a fund, under the newly-created King Hussein Foundation, to support the hospital's treatment of children with cancer. The fund will include contributions proceeds from Al-Ilm Noor Fund and the Noor Al Hussein Foundation's "The King Chemo Play," which was held last year.

The King Hussein Foundation was announced by Royal Decree last Wednesday when His Majesty King Abdullah asked the Queen to head and establish the foundation, which will work "in cooperation with other established institutions, to deepen the values that the late King represented and to develop education to provide incentives for excellence, and to help in providing health care services and environmental protection as well as social justice, and raise the standard of living for Jordanians for social stability and national security."

Queen Noor was received by Abdul Salam Majali, Minister of Health Ishaq Maraga, Minister of Social Development Faisal Rufou, Director of the Royal Medical Services Youssef Qussous, Director General of Al Hussein Medical Centre Faleh Al Nasser, Abdullah Khatib, President of Jordan University Professor Waleed Al Maani, Director of Jordan University Hospital Ghasan Farah and other officials.

Man released after serving one year for murder of wife

By Rana Hussein

AMMAN — A 27-year-old man convicted of killing his wife in July 1997 was released last week after his seven-and-a-half year prison sentence was reduced to one year by the Criminal Court.

Abdul Ghani Suleiman was originally sentenced to seven-and-a-half years by the Criminal Court on Nov. 22, 1998, for stabbing and killing his wife Nimeh Othman, a mother of nine, on July 27, 1997, over "family problems" in the Hussein Refugee Camp.

But in February 1999, the Court of Cassation returned the case to the Criminal Court asking it to reconsider the sentence "because the defendant should be excused because he committed his crime in a fit of fury."

According to court documents, the defendant often quarrelled with his wife over the past five years. She often kicked him out of the house and prevented him from seeing his children, the court said.

On the night of the murder, it added, the defendant, who had spent a few days at his sister's house, returned to his home to see his children, but he and his wife started arguing. The court said that the wife wielded a knife in his face and demanded that he leave the house.

"Instead Suleiman overpowered his wife, and wrested the knife from her, and stabbed her several times in different parts of her body. He then turned himself in to police," the court added.

'The victim's actions violate traditional and religious beliefs and marriage duties which stipulate that a wife should respect, obey and serve her husband, and thus [are] dangerous actions against her husband'

— Criminal Court

The woman was rushed to a nearby hospital and underwent a surgery for

stomach wounds in her head and back but died shortly afterwards of respiratory failure.

During the trial, the court rejected the defendant's plea that he killed his wife in a "fit of fury," stating that Suleiman had lost his temper several times in the past during their continuous quarrels and had often been kicked out of the house by his wife and did not kill her [on any of those occasions].

But last week, the same tribunal ruled that the defendant did indeed benefit from a reduction in penalty "because he committed his crime in a fit of fury."

"The court finds that the victim's actions (wielding a knife at her husband) violate the traditional and religious beliefs and marriage duties which stipulate that the wife should respect, obey and serve her husband, and thus constituted dangerous actions against her husband," the court said.

Therefore, it added, "the defendant benefits from the reduction in penalty because he committed his crime in a fit of fury based on her actions."

The verdict will automatically be reviewed by the Court of Cassation for the second time, when the court will either ratify the ruling or return the case to the Criminal Court.

NEWS IN BRIEF

King Abdullah receives cable

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Saturday received a cable from the participants in the Arab meeting on combating counterfeit crimes in the banking sector in the Arab World. The participants wished King Abdullah success and the Jordanian people continued prosperity and progress.

King Abdullah congratulates Tunisia

AMMAN (Petra) — His Majesty King Abdullah on Saturday sent a cable to Tunisian President Zein Al Abden Ben Ali congratulating him in his name and on behalf of the Jordanian government and people on Tunisia's national day. King Abdullah wished the president and the Tunisian people further progress and development.

Prince Hamzah cables Hariri

AMMAN (Petra) — HRH Crown Prince Hamzah sent a cable to former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri on Saturday in which he expressed his condolences over the death of Hariri's father.

PM to meet associations, parties

AMMAN (J.T.) — Prime Minister Abdur-Ra'ouf S. Rawabdeh on Wednesday will meet the presidents of Jordan's 13 professional associations, a senior official said Saturday. Rawabdeh will also meet the heads of political parties on Thursday. During the meetings, he plans to discuss issues of common concern as part of the government policy to open dialogue with all colours of the political spectrum, the official added.

Trade exhibit opens in West Bank

GAZA (Petra) — A Jordanian trade exhibition opened in Ramallah with the participation of 41 Jordanian companies and industries. Another Jordanian exhibition is being organised in Gaza and will be held in June.

Deputies waiting policy statement to form opinion on government, says House Speaker Majali

AMMAN (J.T.) — The new government will find its task easy and smooth in dealing with the Lower House of Parliament if it executes the directives of His Majesty King Abdullah contained in the Royal letter of designation, according to House speaker Abdul Hadi Majali.

Should the government fail to live up to the commitments as stated in the government policy statement, due to be presented to Parliament early next month, or should there be "excesses" by Cabinet ministers, the government will naturally face difficulties, said Majali in an interview with Al Dustour Arabic daily, published Saturday.

Asked if it was true that parliamentarians have expressed disappointment in their exclusion from the

Cabinet, Majali said deputies generally believe the Constitution provides for the participation of deputies in government.

However, if there is disappointment, it stems from the prime minister's failure to consult with parliamentary blocs in the course of forming the government.

In reply to a question on whether the Parliament is satisfied with the Cabinet's formation, Majali said, "this is a question that should be left to deputies themselves to answer. It will be clear to all during the upcoming confidence vote expected on April 3."

"The fact that deputies congratulated Cabinet members on their new posts does not mean they have granted their confidence," added Majali.

According to Majali, it is

only in light of the government's policy statement that deputies can form an opinion about the Cabinet's plans and judge whether or not it deserves a vote of confidence.

As to Parliament's demand that the press and publications law be amended, Majali said 12 deputies have submitted a motion to review the press law the house's National Guidance Committee. He said the motion will be duly studied before it is put to the House for a debate. Should the House approve it, the motion will be referred to the government, according to the Constitution.

But he noted that in his capacity as a parliamentarian he will not approve the motion since he believes there is no justification to amend the law.

What's Going On

AMMAN FRANCOPHONE DAYS
(All activities are held at the Greater Amman Municipality.)

- SATURDAY MARCH 21**
 - Lecture by Mme Guedj entitled "Identité de la poésie francophone" at 6:30 p.m.
 - Film entitled "Le français comme on l'aime" at 8:00 p.m.
- SUNDAY MARCH 22**
 - Lecture by Mr. Fahdrih about a European project to translate Arab literary works into European languages at 6:30 p.m.
 - Tunisian film "Bye Bye" at 8:00 p.m.
- PLAY**
 - "Beauty and the Beast" at the Amman Baccalaureate School on Monday March 22 at 6:30 p.m. (There will be other performances on Tuesday March 23 and Wednesday March 24).
- LECTURES**
 - Towards a New Arab Perspective on Dealing With Asia (in Arabic) by Dr. Mohammad Sayyid Salim of Egypt at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Jabal Amman on Monday March 22 at 6:30 p.m.
 - "Arab Language's Contribution to Astronomical Terms" by Prof. Paul Kunitzsch at the University of Jordan, Department of Geology on Monday March 22 at 11:00 a.m.
- FILM**
 - "Extreme Measures" at Books@Café, Jabal Amman, at 8:30 p.m. (Tel. 46504578).
- DIALOGUE**
 - Dialogue with Dr. Osama Ghazali, editor-in-chief of Al Siyass magazine, on "The International Political Changes and Their Impact on the Arab World" at Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, Jabal Weibdeh, on Wednesday March 24 at 6:30 p.m.
- POETRY RECITAL**
 - Lecture by Lebanese poet Abdou Wazin on his experience in composing poems (to be followed by poetry recitals) at Darat Al Funun, Jabal Jabal Weibdeh at 6:00 p.m.

Japanese agency struggles to overcome misconceptions about family planning in Ghor Al Safi

'The popular perception that God sends an income with every child is still common'

By Dana Charkasi

GHOR AL SAFI — The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) is spending around JD300,000 a year on a family planning project in the southern Ghor (Valley) area to help raise the quality of life in Jordan.

In a desolate area which has the highest fertility rate and the lowest per capita income in Jordan, few of the impoverished men and women living here know much about modern contraception to help organise family planning.

The JICA project is trying to overcome social and religious barriers to family planning by employing local men and women to promote the concept of birth spacing and by involving religious leaders.

"Southern Ghor has the highest population growth in the country while it has the lowest per capita

income at the same time," Tokiko Sato, project director, told a group of reporters during a tour of the project this week.

According to a study conducted by JICA in 1997, only 70 per cent of the area's inhabitants are familiar with family planning, compared to nearly 100 per cent in the rest of Jordan.

"What makes a significant difference is that only 18 per cent of southern Ghor's population use contraceptives, compared with 32 per cent in other southern areas and with 50 per cent in northern parts of Jordan," added Sato.

In order to promote health awareness on contraception — still a taboo to many because of religious misconception and social conservatism — JICA has enrolled 20 young women from the area to visit households and hold lectures to inform women about this scheme

and other family planning measures.

"During house-to-house visits, our promoters get a lot of feedback on what people need and how they react to our initiative," said Huda, who coordinates these visits.

"In the beginning we faced a lot of suspicion and timidity by the women as family planning in particular is a very sensitive subject," she said.

"Often, we were refused entry into houses. But now that the women know us, we are getting positive reactions and they ask us when the next lecture is taking place," said Aisha Eid, one of the team of promoters.

"It is a good project. We learn about many things we did not know," said Umm Saleh after attending a recent lecture on family planning.

In a male-dominated society, men, the other key to family planning, are

addressed through community leaders, who also invite male promoters to talk on family planning.

"The popular perception that God sends an income with every child is still common," said Mun'im Malkawi, the contact person for men in the project.

"Also, for men, religion often is an argument against family planning," he explained.

"That's why we bring Muslim sheikhs from the region to explain to them that family planning in the sense of birth spacing is not taboo or 'haram' and that total denial of reproduction is haram."

Sato said the number of women who use contraceptives and later give them up because of undesirable side effects remains very high.

Most start who wish to employ some form of birth spacing begin by taking the contraceptive pill and later substitute it with the

IUD.

"Our promoters visit these women and ask them why they discontinue contraceptive use. Most say they give them up because of their side effects," she said.

"Our promoters convince them to come to the centre in order to speak with our doctor to find other suitable contraceptives," said Nozaki, the Japanese project coordinator.

Jordan, among world's countries with the highest population growth rates — 2.6 per cent of natural increase in which the death rate is already accounted for — has a population of 4.6 million that is estimated to double by the year 2020.

With a rapid annual population increase of 3.6 per cent, the country's natural and social resources, including water as well as education, health and other services, are rapidly depleted while develop-

ment achievements are becoming more difficult to sustain.

The situation is further compounded by unemployment — officially estimated at 16 per cent and unofficially at up to 27 per cent.

"We believe that the family planning project is important because the population issue is directly connected to policies on water, food and education, for example," said Hisao.

The three-year Japanese-funded Integrated Family Planning and Women in Development Project was launched in Ghor Al Safi in July 1997.

The National Population Commission, the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development and the Ministry of Health and Health Care are implementing the scheme in cooperation with the JICA.

Its ultimate goal is to improve the living standard of residents in the

impoverished southern Ghor by enhancing awareness among local communities on health, including family planning and by increasing the participation of women and men in economic activities.

Asked whether she thought the project was a success, Taeko Kawamura, a Japanese expert working on the scheme, told the Jordan Times, "I am not so sure. I think yes, I think very slowly there is progress."

She said the JICA might consider extending the project when it ends in July 2000.

"There is a possibility that we will continue this project," she said. "If we feel that we have to continue, there's a chance that we would extend it."

And I would like the people who are currently working on the project to be the community leaders, because they are living in this area," she added.

Starting in May, the project will spend another JD200,000 to offer vocational training for residents, especially women, to support small-scale enterprise and family projects such as a sewing workshops, plastic grinding, a bakery, hybrid goat raising, and bee keeping.

Japanese economic aid to Jordan began in 1974 through the Official Development Assistance (ODA) Programme, with the recognition that Jordan plays a very important role in establishing peace in the Middle East by actively striving to achieve democratic and economic reform.

Since 1974, the cumulative total amount of Japan's ODA to Jordan amounted to a net of US\$1.3 billion as of the end of FY 1996, and about US\$2.1 billion on commitment basis as of the end of FY 1997.

Japan remains one of Jordan's largest foreign donors.

OSCE verifiers, chief pulled out of Kosovo

DJENERAL JANKOVIC, Yugoslavia (AFP) — International observers scrambled out of troubled Kosovo Saturday as NATO air strikes loomed after peace talks faltered in France.

As the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) verifiers crossed the border here into Macedonia, Yugoslav authorities cancelled their visas.

"NATO troops will not need visas when they come to Kosovo," Kosovo Verification Mission (KVM) chief William Walker said before crossing the border to greet the monitors in person as they passed.

Walker was among the first to quit the provincial capital of Pristina at around 4:20 a.m. (0320 GMT) in a convoy of orange vehicles, many of them armoured.

He added that the withdrawal had not hit any major snags yet.

"The evacuation is going much more smoothly than we expected," he said, adding however: "We will be back soon."

The first arrivals, delayed by bad weather on their

way from the Kosovo capital of Pristina 50 kilometres away, said they had experienced no other problems.

A second convoy left Pristina around 5:30 a.m. Mission members left Pristina and other regional centres in groups in order to minimise the dangers.

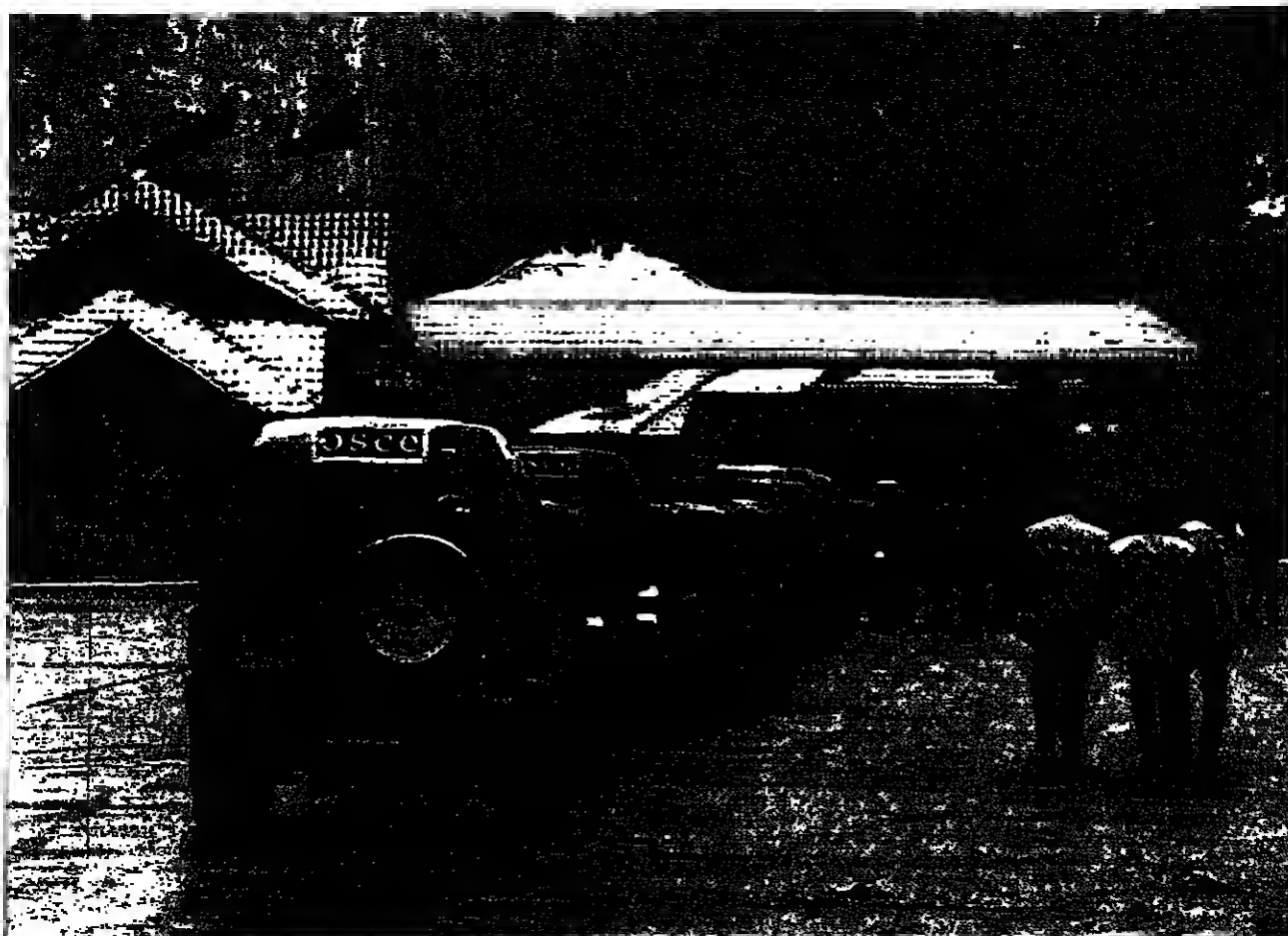
Seven other convoys were scheduled to leave Pristina in successive waves throughout the morning, an Italian KVM official said. Serb police were deployed en masse along the evacuation route.

By afternoon, all of the mission's nearly 1,400 monitors were expected to have reached Macedonia.

A Western diplomat said a convoy of trucks carrying heavy equipment had begun the formalities for crossing the border, to be followed by a second convoy transporting personnel, some 400 vehicles in all.

The verification mission will set up in Skopje, the Macedonian capital some 30 kilometres away, to await events.

Their evacuation from Kosovo comes as tension mounts between separatist ethnic Albanian guerrillas



Cars of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) queue at the border between Yugoslavia and Macedonia early March, 20, 1999, as international observers scramble out of troubled Kosovo as NATO air strikes loomed after peace talks faltered in France (AFP photo)

and Serbian authorities after talks in France closed inconclusively Friday.

Tension on the ground was heightened late Friday when rebels of the Kosovo Liberation Army attacked three police posts in northern and central Kosovo. Police fired back but there were no reports of casualties.

Western leaders have warned that North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

(NATO) war planes will strike Serb targets if they do not follow the ethnic Albanians in signing up to the international peace plan.

"(Yugoslav President Slobodan) Milosevic prefers to lose Kosovo through war than to sign an accord that would constitute his political failure," Montenegro's President Milo Djukanovic said late Friday in Podgorica.

After talks failed Friday, world leaders issued warnings that the Serbs' intransigence would be answered by air strikes.

U.S. President Bill Clinton on Friday cautioned that the "threshold has been crossed" justifying such strikes.

NATO chief Javier Solana warned that the "military clock is ticking" in the province. "It can be stopped, of course, if a

change in the behaviour of the Serbian side is produced in a very short period of time," he added.

Meanwhile, Australia began pulling out its government staff in Belgrade early Saturday and warned other expatriates to leave as well. Australia was the latest in a string of countries including Britain, Canada, France and the U.S., in a mass exodus from the Yugoslav capital.

Fighting blocks Pristina-Belgrade highway

PRISTINA, Serbia (R) — Serb security forces, backed by armour including tanks, blocked the highway between Kosovo's capital Pristina and Belgrade Saturday after a police station came under rebel attack, Serb sources said.

Civilians were also seen fleeing shelling in the hills west of Srbica in north-central Kosovo on Saturday morning as fighting intensified in a dangerous vacuum caused by the withdrawal of international peace monitors.

Reporters were halted by police about 10 km north of Pristina. Tanks, armoured personnel carriers (APCs) and army troops were deployed on and near the highway. Heavy small arms fire tore through the air in the vicinity.

Serb sources said the police station near Luzane, 18 km north of Pristina, was attacked by ethnic Albanian Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) guerrillas using rocket launchers and mortars on Friday evening. No casualties were reported.

Local Serb media said KLA rebels also hit police positions in the north-central towns of Glogovac and Srbica with automatic weapons, anti-tank grenades and mortars on Friday night and Saturday morning.

A Reuters news team trying to drive north along the Glogovac-Srbica road from the Komorane highway junction in

central Kosovo were blocked by Serbian police in battle gear backed by tanks and APCs.

Refugees in the area said there had been fighting.

The Glogovac-Srbica corridor was believed to have been in guerrilla hands as recently as Friday.

In addition, Yugoslav federal army troops with armour were arrayed along the main highway west of Pristina that runs through Komorane en route to Pec in the far west of Kosovo.

The troops were combat-ready with heavy machine guns training off the road as if primed to repel a rebel ambush.

The area between Luzane and Podujevo has seen regular clashes between government troops and guerrillas since mid-December, when a Yugoslav army armoured brigade moved into the area in violation of a ceasefire agreement.

A continuous build-up of government troops and equipment in the region since then has led some observers to worry that a government offensive against suspected KLA positions in the area is about to commence.

Belgrade, the Yugoslav capital, lies about 300 km north of Kosovo.

Saturday's action came as international monitors were pulling out of Kosovo, a province of Serbia with a rebellious 90 per cent ethnic Albanian majority, after peace

talks fell apart in Paris the day before.

Yugoslavia is now under threat of NATO air strikes to force acceptance of the peace deal.

Aid workers trying to make their way north to Belgrade from Pristina to leave the country were blocked by Saturday's fighting.

Reuters reporters met some 30 ethnic Albanian refugees from the village of Poklek, outside Glogovac, about 20 km west of Pristina. Mostly women and children, they were trudging through the snow as shells exploded in the distance.

The refugees said security forces began bombarding a nearby village at 7 a.m. (0600 GMT) Saturday from the Koretica area where the Serbs were known to have armour and artillery.

"Only God knows how much we have suffered and we're still suffering now," said Sanjije Hoxha, an elderly woman clad in a headscarf and leaning wearily on a cane after walking across a field following her flight from Poklek.

A man who was too much in a hurry to stop long to speak to reporters said only: "We don't know what's happening. We woke up to find our village surrounded by army and police. We just don't know what's happening."

Myanmar junta steps up pressure on Suu Kyi over husband

YANGON (AFP) — Myanmar on Saturday urged democracy leader Aung San Suu Kyi to visit her cancer-stricken husband in Britain, saying its own medical facilities were too primitive for him to visit Yangon.

Michael Aris, who is terminally ill, has asked for a visa to visit Myanmar to say a final goodbye to his wife before he dies.

Aung San Suu Kyi, who is locked in a bitter political struggle with the government, fears she will be barred from returning home if she leaves the country to see him.

A government statement issued here said officials were "sympathetic" to Aris' request, which was still under consideration.

"Myanmar medical authorities are concerned, however, that Aris might not be able to receive proper medical care in Myanmar, and that he might

put an undue burden on the country's limited medical resources."

"Medical facilities in Myanmar for terminally ill cancer patients are very limited and such patients are usually sent from Myanmar to more developed countries for proper treatment," the statement added.

"While Aris' visa application is currently under review, the government suggests that it is more humane for a person in perfect health to make the journey to fulfil the terminally ill husband's wish to see her."

Britain, the United States and Australia are among nations which have called on Myanmar to issue a visa to Aris on humanitarian grounds.

Aris is seriously ill after prostate cancer spread to his spine and lungs, according to reports in Britain.

Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition National League for

Democracy (NLD) won a landslide victory in elections in 1990, but the government has refused to hand over power and has conducted a long campaign against the party.

Aris has made several visits to Myanmar since his wife, the daughter of independence hero Aung San, returned to the country in 1988 and emerged at the head of the pro-democracy movement.

He was last in the country between Dec. 18, 1995, and Jan. 16, 1996.

Myanmar's official media, which vilifies Aung San Suu Kyi, a Nobel Peace Prize winner, as an agent of foreign powers, has issued repeated calls for her expulsion.

The government insists it is not its policy to force the NLD abroad but claims she is disqualified from high political office by her marriage to a foreigner.

Russian market bomb toll hits 64 as probe gets under way

MOSCOW (AFP) — The death toll in the Vladikavkaz market bombing rose to 64 Saturday as doctors operated around the clock on the injured and police stepped up the hunt for those responsible for the outrage.

Doctors said 104 people were undergoing hospital treatment for injuries received in Friday's blast, which ripped through a crowded market in the capital of the southern Russian republic of North Ossetia, ITAR-TASS said.

City hospitals worked flat out overnight to cope with the flood of wounded suffering blast and shrapnel injuries, with 800 city residents offering to donate blood, the state-run ORT television channel reported.

"There are a lot of bodies which have not been identified," Vladikavkaz mayor Mikhail Shatalov told the television station. So far only 21 bodies have been

identified, the Interfax news agency reported.

The death toll could rise further as many of the wounded were in serious condition.

Vladikavkaz was calm early Saturday in the wake of the attack but all city markets have been closed down temporarily as a security measure as investigators attempt to piece together events which led up to the bombing.

Investigators so far have few leads from the survivors and contradictory reports about who was responsible for the attack swirled through the city.

Russian Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin said police had put together photofit portraits of two men wanted in connection with the blast but local television broadcast images of a man and a woman wanted for questioning, a city journalist told AFP by telephone.

Stepashin, despatched to

Vladikavkaz to oversee the rescue and investigation work, said Moscow was contacting the breakaway Russian republic of Checheoya, which neighbours North Ossetia, in an effort to track down the bombers.

"We have taken the necessary steps to prevent breaches of public order," Stepashin told ORT.

"We have sent via Moscow a telegramme to the Chechen security ministry to establish contact in the search for the criminals and their possible entry into another territory," he added.

Vladimir Putin, head of the Federal Security Service (FSB), the main successor to the KGB, is also in the North Ossetian capital to help with the investigation into the worst act of terrorism in modern Russia.

President Boris Yeltsin on Friday vowed the authorities would "lead a merciless fight" to punish the culprits.

Latin American leaders pledge to strengthen democracy, human rights

VERACRUZ, Mexico (AP) — Latin America formally pledged to strengthen democracy and respect for human rights, and fight the many serious ills afflicting the continent, from corruption to drugs and poverty.

The pledge was contained in a document, "the act of Veracruz," approved by consensus Friday at a meeting of 14 foreign ministers representing Latin America and the Caribbean.

At the one-day meeting, the foreign ministers also set up "flexible and informal" mechanisms for consulting each other to better deal with world financial crises and other top world issues affecting Latin America.

They further approved an agenda — not immediately disclosed — for a meeting of Latin American presidents known as the "Rio Group" May 27-28 in Mexico City. This meeting in turn will prepare for a summit of Latin

American presidents with chiefs of government of the 15-nation European Union in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, next June.

The purposes of that summit will be to explore ways of strengthening political and trade ties with the European continent and increase investments in Latin America.

For more than a decade, Latin American governments have been trying to establish closer relations with European nations.

While many admit the United States will continue to predominate in Latin America politically and in trade, they say opportunities in Europe have not been fully developed.

Mexican Foreign Secretary Rosario Green said the Mexico City summit "will provide a singular opportunity for our presidents to retake the initiative and push for concrete action to fortify global financial balance." Last year's financial

crisis in Russia and the Far East, and this year's crises in Brazil and Ecuador have shaken Latin America.

Mexico and Argentina have weathered the crises fairly well.

But Mexico, whose currency has remained surprisingly stable since its economic crisis in 1994-95, has had a hard time persuading outside investors that not all emerging markets are on the brink of bankruptcy. Many institutional investors — especially in the United States — lumped Mexico with the Brazilian crisis for a while.

Officials say such repercussions could have been avoided if there had been faster and closer communication among governments.

The same was true in responding to last year's devastations caused by forest fires and hurricane Mitch in Central America and Mexico.

NEWS IN BRIEF

U.K.'s Cook warns Serbs of NATO action in days

LONDON (R) — British Foreign Secretary Robin Cook warned Saturday that NATO action against the Serbs could begin within days unless Yugoslav President Slobodan Milosevic agreed to a peace deal with ethnic Albanians in Kosovo. In an interview with BBC Radio, Cook also said that the West was ready to reconvene peace talks on Kosovo at any time if Belgrade decided it was ready to accept the peace package on the war-ravaged province. "If there is no progress, we are looking at a time scale of a matter of days in which (NATO military) action can begin," he said. "As it is, the situation is very grave." He said peace talks had collapsed in Paris Friday "because in truth the Serb side were showing no serious commitment to negotiation, and were plainly filibustering." They had gone back on points agreed before, Cook said. "We will continue with our (military) preparations," he said. "At any time we are willing to reconvene the peace talks, but only if Belgrade first tells us that it really is willing to accept the peace package." On Thursday, Kosovo's ethnic Albanians, who have been struggling for independence, accepted the deal, worked out through international mediation, that would bring them autonomy. International peace monitors are now being pulled out of Kosovo, and Britain Friday joined other western countries in ordering its nationals out of Yugoslavia.

Four blasts target public buildings in Corsica

BASTIA, Corsica (AFP) — Four blasts targeting public buildings on the French island of Corsica caused severe damage overnight but injured no one, police said on Saturday. A medium-strength bomb exploded at the Central Post Office in Bastia, causing serious damage, shattering windows in neighbouring buildings and damaging four cars parked nearby. A second blast completely destroyed the building that housed the civil court in Sartene whose mayor, Dominique Buchini, ran on the left-wing list in legislative elections held last Sunday. The third blast exploded on a window sill of the building where the regional infrastructure authority is based, causing significant damage. The fourth explosion seriously damaged the cafeteria of a holiday camp run by the French interior ministry in the town of Casabianca. No group took responsibility for the attacks, which came a week after the island's most militant separatists, FLNC-Historic Wing, ended a ceasefire called to help nationalists running in the elections. The attacks came a day after a Paris criminal court sentenced three suspected FLNC members to prison terms of between six and 10 years for their role in an attempted attack against the Ajaccio chamber of commerce, Corsica Nazione, the political party dominated by politicians linked to FLNC-Historic Wing, won a strong showing in last week's elections, helping topple the absolute majority of the island's conservative parties. In its most recent statement, the FLNC reiterated threats to use any means in its struggle for independence saying: "We will strike when we want, where we want." Last May the same group resumed its armed struggle for independence after a three-month ceasefire called following the murder of the island's top state official, Claude Erignac.

Seven Maoist insurgents killed in clash with Nepal police

KATHMANDU (AFP) — Seven Maoist activists were killed in a clash with Nepal police, officials said Saturday. One insurgent and three police were wounded in the incident Friday at Anaitok village, Kabre district, 35 kilometres east of here, they added. Police said some 500 bullets were fired in the exchange, which lasted two hours. Police had approached the rebels' village hideout but were spotted and came under fire, a home ministry source said. The Maoists also tried to throw explosives and a petrol bomb at police, but the bombs exploded inside the house, setting it on fire and burning two nearby houses. The extreme left underground Nepal Communist Party-Maoist (NCP-M) has been waging a "people's war" since February 1996 against the constitutional monarchical democratic system in Nepal and wants to replace it with a republic. Maoist-related violence has dramatically increased since their insurgency entered its fourth year in February. The uprising has left more than 661 people dead, most of them insurgents but also including police and villagers.

Indian journalist found dead

NEW DELHI (AP) — The body of a freelance journalist was found Saturday in his home with stab wounds and strangulation marks on his neck, police said. He was the third journalist to be slain in New Delhi in the past two months, but it was unclear if the killings were related to their work. Neither of the previous killings have been solved. The body of Anil Rattan, 42, was lying in his blood in the bathroom, said his brother, Ashok Rattan. He was worked for various domestic and foreign news organisations and specialised in covering bridge tournaments. Rattan was a bachelor and lived alone in the house. Police were investigating the motive for the crime. Irfan Hussain, a cartoonist working with Outlook magazine, was abducted earlier this month and his body was found by a busy highway with multiple stab wounds. Shivani Bhatnagar, an investigative reporter for the Indian Express, was killed by two visitors to her home nearly two months ago. Rattan was apparently killed Thursday night. The newspapers from Friday and Saturday were still lying in the driveway when police arrived at the crime scene. His maid found the front entrance open when she came to work Saturday and discovered the body.

'Rebels surround town in Uganda'

KAMPALA (AP) — Rebels seeking to destabilise the government of President Yoweri Museveni have surrounded a town in western Uganda and killed 10 people in four days, an independent newspaper said Saturday. The Monitor said rebels of the Allied Democratic Forces have surrounded Bundibugyo, 380 kilometres west of centre of the small town in the foothills of the Rwenzori mountains. It was not possible to obtain comment on the report from military or government officials Saturday. In June 1997, ADF rebels and Rwandan Hutu militiamen overran Bundibugyo, which lies close to the border with Congo and is essentially cut off from the rest of Uganda by mountainous terrain and bad roads. The attackers were eventually pushed back by the Ugandan army, but the rebels, who have their bases across the border in the Congo, remain active.

World

Malaysia

Invit
Education
International
OEC
Al-Balqa'
bidders to



A health ministry worker fogs an area around a pig farm before Malaysian soldiers began shooting the pigs in Sungai Nipah, 100 kilometres southwest of Kuala Lumpur. Malaysian troops began shooting over 300,000 pigs on Saturday to fight a virus that has killed more than 50 people and created a major health scare (Reuters photo)

Malaysia troops shoot pigs to battle virus

CHUAH, Malaysia (R) — Malaysian troops started shooting the first of more than 300,000 pigs Saturday in an attempt to stop the spread of a virus that has killed more than 50 people.

Authorities plan to destroy about 35,000 pigs daily over 10 days in three villages in Negri Sembilan state, about 100 km south of Kuala Lumpur.

Over a thousand non-Muslim soldiers — pigs are considered unclean in Islam and Muslims will not come in contact with them — are involved in the operation, which will wipe out almost half of the pigs in the country's largest pig-breeding region.

There were an estimated two million pigs in the country before the outbreak, and thousands have already been slaughtered.

The operation has been mounted in response to an outbreak of a disease that has killed 53 people. It was initially thought that all the deaths were caused by Japanese encephalitis (JE), which

is latent in infected pigs and spread to man by mosquitoes, but a second virus has been isolated. As yet unidentified, the second virus is also thought to be pig-related.

Members of the military force told Reuters that the pigs would be shot one by one, disembowelled and buried on the farms.

"Disembowelling is to prevent bloating of the pig's stomach which may force the dead pigs out the ground as many would be buried in shallow pits," one said.

The soldiers wore hoods, gloves and surgical masks.

Tractors and bulldozers are also moving into the farms.

Most of the residents in the area have fled their homes since the outbreak began. The rest were evacuated by police on Friday night.

Negri Sembilan veterinary department director Majid Awang said that about 65,000 pigs were expected to be killed over the weekend in the area.

He said the daily operation would stop at 5

p.m. (0900 GMT) because the culex mosquitoes, which carry JE, are active from dusk to dawn.

At least 33 people have died in the area of the cull, bringing the death toll since October in Negri Sembilan and Perak state to 53, officials said.

All of the victims have lived on or near pig farms.

Although the deaths have created a major health scare, there is no sign of a nationwide panic.

News that a second deadly virus had been identified has added to the confusion which has prompted many panic-stricken residents of the area to flee, abandoning their pigs.

Director-general of health Abu Bakar Suleiman said on Friday the new virus was part of the paramyxovirus family of viruses, unrelated to JE. He said five of the deaths in Negri Sembilan were caused by the new virus.

But officials are convinced Japanese encephalitis is also present in the region.

The U.S. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in Atlanta is sending scientists to Malaysia to investigate the mysterious disease.

Malaysian opposition leader Lim Kit Siang accused the government of holding back information about the second virus, which is believed to be related to the hendra virus that killed two people in Australia in 1994.

"Lives would have been saved if the information about the hendra virus-related discovery had been made public without any delay, giving clear warning that it is unrelated to JE and not mosquito-borne but spread through close contact with live pigs infected with this deadly virus," he said in a statement.

Lim also asked Health Minister Chua Jui Meng to order a full inquiry into the causes of the viral outbreak which has affected the country's 1.4 billion pig-rearing industry.

S. Korea, Japan warn against N. Korean military threat

SEOUL (R) — South Korea and Japan issued a stern warning to North Korea Saturday, calling for a joint defence structure with the United States to deal with military threats from the Stalinist state.

"We must tell the North that it would be the North which would suffer massive damage if it launched provocation," South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung told a news conference after talks with visiting Japanese Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi.

"We must not let the north use nuclear weapons and missiles," Obuchi's trip comes a few days after a breakthrough agreement in New York between the United States and North Korea which allows U.S. access to an underground North Korean site suspected of being a secret nuclear project.

Kim said he and Obuchi agreed that Seoul, Tokyo and Washington should make joint security arrangements to respond to weapons of mass destruction being produced by

Pyongyang. "North Korea is adopting a military strategy to intensify develop weapons of mass destruction, and depending on the situation North Korea is trying to use them to inflict massive damage," Kim said.

"We must not sanction North Korea's strategy," he said. "The most basic thing we should do is that South Korea, Japan and the United States closely cooperate with one another and build a strong defence structure to block North Korea from waging a war."

Kim described North Korea as a "difficult partner" to deal with, saying the reclusive state's economy was in dire straits while its 1.2 million-strong military was weakening.

North and South Korea remain technically at war as their 1950-53 conflict ended in an armed truce with no peace treaty.

Obuchi urged Pyongyang to open a dialogue with Japan and the capitalist South to

ensure peace in Asia.

"Together with President Kim Dae-Jung, I would like to tell North Korea that we are ready to improve our relations with North Korea," Obuchi told the same news conference on the second day of his three-day visit to the colony which Japan occupied from 1910 to 1945.

The calls for closer defence ties between Tokyo and Seoul were criticised by some South Koreans.

About 100 staged an anti-Japanese rally in downtown Seoul, including a number of so-called "comfort women" — Japanese army sex slaves during World War II.

"Why does the government allow them to visit even though Japan hasn't yet apologised at all?" said Hwang Keum-Joo, 79.

Hundreds of students scuffled with riot police when Obuchi tried to leave Korea university in central Seoul after a speech.

A shocked Tokyo broke off talks on restoring ties and

froze food aid to famine-hit North Korea after Pyongyang test-fired a missile over Japan last August.

"The North Korean missile issue is a threat to Japan, but it is more threatening to South Korea," the South Korean president said. "We always feel the threat."

The United States and North Korea are set to hold a fresh round of talks on Pyongyang's missile production and sales in the North Korean capital on March 29.

Obuchi said Japan would extend full support for South Korea's "sunshine policy" towards Pyongyang, which seeks to open up the North by boosting business and cultural ties.

Later on Saturday, Kim said "any aggressive attempts" by North Korea must be prevented.

"If North Korea cooperates with U.S. in ensuring peace, we will never hesitate to pay the equivalent in return," Kim told a banquet in Obuchi's honour.

Severed heads paraded in Borneo after ethnic violence

TEBAS, Indonesia (AFP) — Indigenous Dayaks and ethnic Malays waving freshly severed heads paraded through this small town in Indonesian Borneo Saturday as the death toll from six days of ethnic bloodshed soared to over 60 and police issued shoot-on-sight orders.

Crowds appeared on the dusty streets to cheer as a pick-up truck carrying triumphant men waving three heads at them, shouting "Long Live Malays" and brandishing spears, pitchforks and long knives.

Smoke rose from clusters of houses inside the town. One of the three migrants from Madura island who was decapitated was rumoured to have been a local teacher, but this could not be confirmed.

No military personnel were in sight to witness the grisly procession, but the afternoon Suara Pambanuan daily said West

Kalimantan police chief Chaerul Rasyidi had issued shoot-on-sight orders in an effort to stem the carnage, between the Madurese settlers on the one side and the local Dayaks and Malays on the other, which erupted Monday.

Thirteen people are known to have been killed Friday in clashes in eight sub-districts, the Kompas daily said, adding to reports that 51 had died earlier in the week.

At least 15,000 Madurese have fled Sambas district, which includes Tebas, by boat and truck for the West Kalimantan provincial capital of Pontianak, 145 kilometres away, Kompas said, while the Jakarta Post reported 1,000 houses had been torched.

Fires could be seen burning in the town of Pematang on Saturday, a telephone operator working for the state Telkom

company said. "But I don't know whether it was from last night or a new one. But there's still some fireworks in Pematang today."

An officer at the Singkawang district police said the situation in Sambas had calmed down with businesses returning to normal. "It's calm now and there is nothing going on," the officer told AFP.

He added that scores of people involved in the clashes had been taken in for questioning.

"I cannot tell you how many, they are still being investigated," the private Surya Citra Television news said in the district capital of Singkawang that residents were guarding the streets armed with machetes and other sharp objects. Shops had been shuttered and streets deserted in Singkawang overnight, it added.

Security forces set up road blocks at entry points into Singkawang and were frisking all who passed in and out of the city for concealed weapons. Evacuation was underway of some of the thousands of refugees who had taken refuge in military facilities in Singkawang following rumours that a Dayak-Malay mob from neighbouring villages was preparing to attack the town.

Two leaders of the Madurese community on Saturday made an open public apology to the local ethnic group for "any insult or violation" of local traditions they may have committed in the past. Surya Citra did not clarify how they had delivered their apology.

The television report said the death toll stood at 62, with the possibility of more dead as security forces continued the search for bodies.

Invitation for Bids Educational Sector Project - Phase (II) International Competitive Bidding (ICB) OECF Loan No. (JO - P10)

Al-Balqa' Applied University invites Interested bidders to participate in the following tenders:

Tender No.	Subject	Date of submission of bids	Date of opening of bids	Fee (JD)
33/99 (two lots)	Plant and Animal Production Equipment	21/3/1999	22/5/1999	100
34/99 (three lots)	Information Technology (PCs, Networks, Printers, Scanners and Multimedia Equipment)	21/3/1999	22/5/1999	150

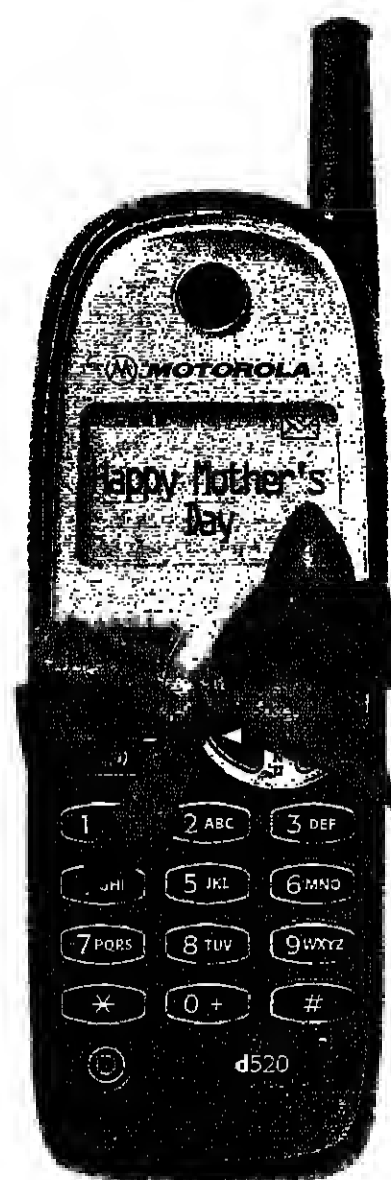
- Eligible bidders may obtain tender documents at the Central Tendering Committee office/ Al-Balqa' Applied University - Al - Salt against the payment of a non-refundable fee as stated above, and presenting a valid professional license and a registration certificate commencing on or before March 21st, 1999.

- Tender documents may be purchased by an authorized representative of the bidder upon submission of an official request.

- Bids shall be deposited in the "Bids Box" at the Central Tendering Committee office/ Al-Balqa' Applied University - Al-Salt or by mail, not later than 14:00 pm (local time) on May 22nd, 1999.

- Bids shall be opened on May 22nd, 1999 at 15:00 pm (local time).

Chairman,
Central Tendering Committee
Abdel Halim Al-Zu'bi



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* Please Note: (1) A JD 100 deposit may apply. (2) Offer does not include airtime charges. Prices subject to 10% government sales tax. Offer not applicable to Satel subscriptions. Jordanian nationals must present proof of their national identity number. Non-residents must present proof of their residency. Motorola D520 available separately at JD 273. Regular rates will be applied if subscription is terminated within 90 days. Offer valid only on March 21st, 1999.

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An independent Arab political daily published in English by the Jordan Press Foundation since 1995

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Editorial and Advertising offices
Jordan Press Foundation,
University Road, P.O. Box 6710, Amman

Telephones: 5684311, 5699634, 5667171, 5603585

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Happy ending

THANKS TO the personal interventions of King Fahd and President Nelson Mandela, and the cooperation of Muammar Qadhafi, the 10-year-old Lockerbie crisis is about to be resolved. President Mandela travelled to Tripoli on Friday together with Prince Bandar, the Saudi envoy to the U.S., to put the final touches on the accord between Libya and the U.N. under which two Libyans suspected of involvement in the bombing of a Pan Am plane over Lockerbie, Scotland, more than ten years ago killing 270 people, will finally stand trial.

The three principal features of the deal that would allow the handing over of the two Libyan nationals accused of bombing the plane entail the convening of a Scottish court in the Netherlands to try the two in accordance with Scottish law. This particular feature is clearly a compromise between Tripoli, which insisted all along that the trial of its two nationals be held in the Netherlands, and London and Washington both of which called for a trial in Scotland where the crash took place.

It must be noted that the convening of a Scottish court in another sovereign foreign land is a legal novelty without a precedent but one that nevertheless offers a workable opportunity to bridge the gap between two opposing views. Since the second aspect of the compromise agreement entails the imprisonment of the two suspects in Scotland under U.N. supervision with free access to Libyan authorities, the breakthrough appears to be fair enough to satisfy two conflicting demands. Tripoli has always feared that once jailed in a foreign country, they could be subjected to pressure that would implicate other Libyan officials. Armed with U.N. supervision and free access to its two nationals, Tripoli's fears seem to have been put to rest.

The immediate freezing of the sanctions applied on Libya once the two suspects are turned over to the Netherlands to stand trial coupled with assurances that the sanctions will be lifted within 90 days is indeed a happy ending to the ordeal the Libyans suffered during the past years. With this balanced deal, the Lockerbie case can soon be behind the international community so that normalcy in the global relations with Tripoli can be restored.

ARABIC PRESS COMMENTARIES

AI Ra'i's Fahed Faneek said that although the economic reform programme ended this year, only few people know that the plan has been suspended since 1998 because its objectives contradicted the requirements. Fortunately, local and foreign public opinion did not notice this bitter fact, the declaration of which affected Jordan's economic position and attractiveness to investors, added Faneek. The International Monetary Fund once considered the Kingdom a model of achievement, but is no longer enthusiastic to launch another programme," he added. However, the current international positive situation and the support pledged to Jordan by Arab and foreign countries has facilitated a second agreement with the Fund and the World Bank to help Jordan escape its economic and financial problems, said the writer. Faneek quoted an official as saying that the new programme, which is awaiting the approval of the Cabinet within three weeks, does not include any "surprises," and the government is expected to implement it without obstacles.

AI Dustour's editorial commented on yesterday's trilateral meeting of foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt and the PNA, which came at a time when Israel is suspending the Wye River accord and "killing the spirit of peace." The meeting was of "special" importance because it came ahead of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat's meeting with Clinton for talks on the peace process, the declaration of an independent state and other related issues, added the editorial. Jordan is very concerned about the meeting, which aims at saving the region's peace and the Palestinians' legitimate rights and at helping them meet their obstacles. The newspaper said the meeting was part of ongoing coordination on final status issues. His Majesty King Abdullah renewed Jordan's stand and commitments to support the Palestinian "brothers" to determining their fate on their national soil, the paper concluded.

A reply to Wall Street Journal's correspondent

Mr. Stephen Glain,
Correspondent
The Wall Street Journal
Inter-Continental Hotel
Amman

THANK YOU for your undated letter enclosing a copy of your story published in the Wall Street Journal, and asking me to read it in case I still haven't figured out what is wrong with the Jordanian economy.

I want to assure you that I know what is wrong with the Jordanian economy, but, unlike you, I don't make my sole objective to dwell on that side alone. There is something wrong in every economy including that of the United States, but economic reporters do not only search for what is wrong. There are other aspects which deserve attention, like what should be done, and what are the options and alternatives.

I read your article dedicated to what is wrong. I am definitely ready to learn from you, because I am interested in seeing the

Jordanian economy from the perspective of a foreigner, and bow a journalist with very little information and insight about a country will tackle the task of reporting to serious readers who need to learn about Jordan, especially on the sad occasion of the passing away of King Hussein.

Unfortunately, your article was misleading in two ways. First you made a generalised judgement based on the experience of one project in Ma'an, which, by no means, is a representative sample, and second because you committed lots of errors in dealing with the facts.

First of all you mixed up the antique Hejaz railway with the Aqaba railway used to transport phosphate to Aqaba for export. Second, you arbitrarily determined that 35 per cent of the staff in this enterprise are unnecessary. Did you expect a different state of affairs in a government owned and managed corporation? Is it strange to find thousands of unnecessary labourers in uneco-

nomie coal mines in Europe for social purposes?

When you translated the loss of the Aqaba Railway of JD5 million into \$7 million, you said "at yesterday's exchange rate" implying that the exchange rate of the JD in dollars fluctuates from day to day. You should have known that the JD has been pegged to the dollar at a fixed price since 1995.

You also mentioned as a fact that just under half of Jordan's working-age population, some 450,000 people, is on the state payroll. The actual percentage is 23.5 per cent which is admittedly very high but way below the figure you picked. They include 157,000 in the civil service, 85,000 in the military and 40,000 in other public institutions out of a total manpower of 1.2 million.

You mentioned that "last month, four bedouin sheikhs walked into the office of a top railway director unannounced and petitioned for jobs" adding that "this happens every day." Why did you mention last month if this happens every

Sunday's Economic Pulse



Dr. Fahed Faneek

day? Well it is useful to know that sheikhs don't work as labourers, and that bedouins in Jordan amount to less than one per cent of the population. Many of those who used to be bedouins are found among the faculties of the 18 universities of Jordan.

You stated that Jordan was created as a buffer to protect Israel against a hostile Arab World. You should know better, and your

readers deserve better reporting. Jordan allowed Arab armies to enter Jordan to participate in all the wars between Israel and the Arab World especially in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973. The Arab World, especially the oil rich Gulf states, needed Jordan as a buffer to protect themselves against a hostile Israel.

You finally were kind enough to mention something which is not wrong in the Jordanian economy, namely that inflation is under control and the dinar is stable, but to be consistently negative, you gave the credit to the policies of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). I wonder why you did not blame IMF policies for the lack of economic growth, high unemployment and poverty. Is double standards the answer?

Now that I know what is wrong with the Jordanian economy, thanks to your article, I hope that you, in turn, will know what is wrong with your reckless reporting after reading this.

Letters to the editor

Ready to assist

THE LETTERS to the editor column (JT, March 10) highlighted the baptism site presently being excavated by archaeologists on the eastern side of the River Jordan. The writer of the letter expressed concern over the tourism development plans being made for the area and suggested that UNESCO, or other agencies, should be invited to revise the proposals.

Quite coincidentally, the day prior to the publication of the letter, my colleague, an experienced culture specialist with our office, and I visited the site and viewed the archaeological work currently being undertaken. Indeed, the entire area has considerable historical significance and we were impressed by the range of discoveries being made.

As an international organisation with technical expertise in the preservation and sustainable development of the cultural and natural heritage, UNESCO has an active and fruitful partnership with its Member States. In the past, we have worked closely with the Jordanian authorities on matters relating to Petra, Qasr Amra, Jerash and other important sites. Where necessary, UNESCO expresses its concern about encroaching urban development or inappropriate proposals which can affect the integrity and significance of historical and natural areas of importance, particularly those listed on the World Heritage Register. Your correspondent can, therefore, be assured that we stand ready to assist the Jordanian authorities, upon their request, in respect to providing planning expertise concerning any cultural site of national and global significance in the country.

Martin Hadlow

Director, UNESCO

Regional Office for Culture and Communication

Amman

Israel's underhand tactics

LIKE MOST Jordanians, I was appalled when I first heard that Israel was considering giving Jordan less water than it is required to under the terms of the Peace Treaty. I welcome the government's firm stand on this matter, and have confidence that they will handle it appropriately.

While Israel is trying to present this move as a temporary measure to cope with a "natural" drought, I believe it needs to be viewed as part of a consistent pattern in Israeli policy. In every part of the peace process Israel has signed agreements, failed to implement them, and then forced a renegotiation of the existing agreement on terms more favourable to its ever-increasing demands. Until now, Jordan has been relatively immune to this Israeli tactic, but it now seems to be spreading even to Israel's modest commitments under the 1994 peace treaty.

This tactic has been apparent at every step in the implementation of the Oslo accords, signed with the Palestinians. Despite Israel's signed commitments to withdraw from occupied Palestinian territory, Israel has constantly demanded renegotiations, such as the Hebron agreement, and lately, the Wye River accords. Having failed to implement even the meagre commitments made at Wye River, we should not be surprised if Israel demands yet another renegotiation. Israel has made all sorts of commitments to the Palestinians, under these accords, such as the opening of a seaport and a "safe passage" between occupied Gaza and the occupied West Bank, none of which have been fulfilled. All the while, Israeli settlers continue to devour Palestinian land, while the army demolishes Palestinian homes, and maintains a permanent closure on occupied Jerusalem, preventing Muslims and Christians from the occupied territories from reaching their holy places, going to hospital, or simply visiting friends and relatives in the Holy City.

As for Israel's claim that it is short of water, we should note that a recent joint study conducted by scientists from Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and the United States, found that while the Palestinians and Jordanians are consuming 3,600 and 8,500 cubic feet per capita, respectively, Israel is consuming nearly 13,000 cubic feet per capita. Much of this water is pumped from right beneath the occupied territories, while Palestinians are not even permitted to dig wells on their own land.

Until the existing water resources are shared equitably, Jordan's answer to Israel's requests to renegotiate our peace treaty should be clear: "Meet your commitments, there is nothing to discuss."

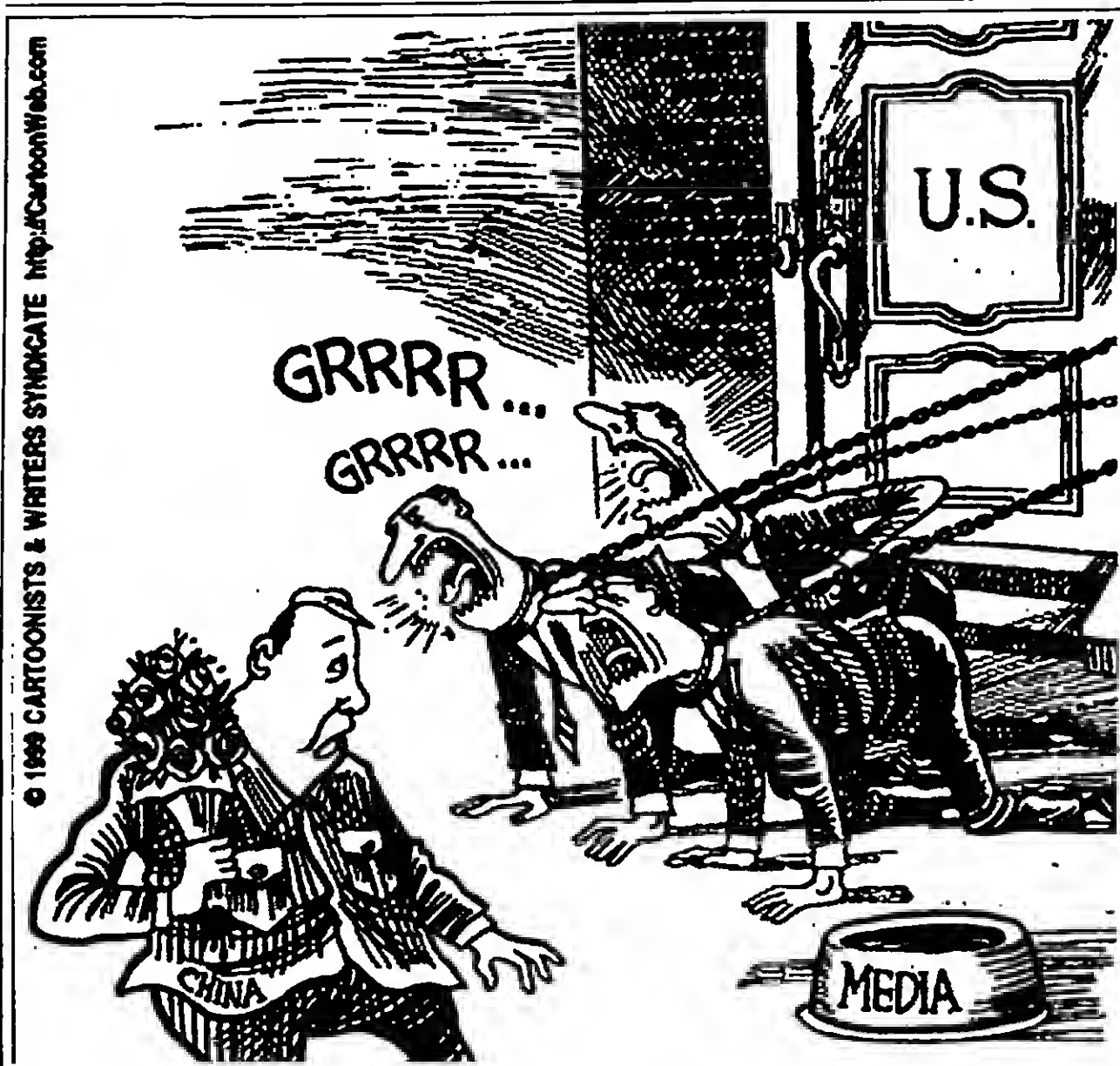
Ali Abunimah

Chicago, Illinois

U.S.

ahabunim@midway.uchicago.edu

The Jordan Times welcomes letters and contributions from its readers on any issue they wish to tackle. Letters intended for publication should contain the writer's full name and preferably address as well. Names can be withheld upon request but only under special circumstances. Letters are subject to editing and abridging.



Revolution in Europe

By Gwynne Dyer

"O FELIX CULPA," says the Catholic Missal. Oh happy fault of Adam's, who succumbed to the Devil's temptation and thereby made it necessary for God to come into the world and redeem mankind. And perhaps that is the light in which we should view the mass resignation of all 20 members of the European Commission on Monday night, after a damning report found several of them guilty of "favouritism". (It stopped short of using the word "corruption", but others would not.)

"I've resigned. I'm going for a drink," said the Agriculture Commissioner, Austrian Franz Fischler, shortly after midnight, as the other members continued to debate the report of the "Committee of the Wise". Like most other commissioners, he was not personally accused of wrong-doing, but what else can you do when the bureaucracy you are supposed to control is accused of being so far gone that "it is becoming difficult to find anyone who has even the slightest sense of responsibility?"

The rest of the commissioners got the message soon after, and resigned en masse. Some of them will doubtless be re-appointed to serve out the remainder of the Commission's term, but definitely not former French prime minister Edith Cresson, the member who came in for the severest criticism on the honesty front, nor the president of the Commission, former Luxembourg prime minister Jacques Santer, whose lax supervision made the whole scandal possible.

It all comes at what seems the worst possible moment for the European Union. On January 1 the new common currency, the euro, was launched by eleven of the fifteen EU member states — and promptly began to tumble against the dollar. In ten weeks, it has fallen from US\$1.18 to \$1.09. For this, proud nation states are giving up the mark, the franc, and the lira? (Well, all right, they don't mind giving up the lira — but the mark and the franc, they do.)

Then the summit of the agriculture ministers last month, which was supposed to bring the EU's bloated Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) under control so that it could afford to absorb new members from Eastern Europe, ended in a shameful fudge that saved no money and inflicted little pain on

those who get the biggest subsidies.

The British and German governments, among others, effectively repudiated the deal their farm ministers had initiated. But the entire timetable for bringing in Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia and Cyprus as early as 2002, to be followed by Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria a few years later, was thrown into question. If the EU cannot get its own farm subsidies under control, there is no way that it can afford to take in these new members, all of whom have huge and very uncompetitive farming sectors.

And then last week the German government, which holds the rotating presidency of the European Union for the first half of 1999, went through an internal convulsion centred on the shock resignation of finance minister and left-wing standard-bearer Oskar Lafontaine. It is no longer clear what the EU's biggest country thinks about the great issues that confront the evolving European... what? Federation? Confederation? Glorified customs union?

Even at that level of abstraction, German policy is less than clear. Helmut Kohl, the selfless apostle of European federation — he never made the mistake of calling it the United States of Europe, but that was what he meant — has been gone since last October's election.

Chancellor Gerhard Schröder talks like a Euro-loyalist, but he is of a different party and a different generation. Now that Lafontaine's resignation has deprived the Social Democratic party's left wing of a strong voice in the German government (and opened the door to a new coalition without the Greens), it is hard to predict just which way Germany will jump.

And on top of all that comes the implosion of the European Commission, bringing the entire administration of the enterprise of European unity into moral disrepute.

It might reasonably be argued that this is what you should expect when most of the commissioners are former national politicians, appointed on a patronage basis by national governments, who bring with them to Brussels the widely varying standards that prevail in different member countries as to just how far you can go in using your office to help your friends — or yourself. But it isn't a good argument.

Most people anywhere know that appoint-

ing your personal dentist, from your own hometown, as your science adviser (as Edith Cresson did) is flagrant nepotism. Allowing a "state within a state" to develop, where European Commission security guards routinely cancelled parking tickets and drink-driving charges against friends, as occurred on Jacques Santer's watch, is not acceptable behaviour even in the average city of a quarter-million (which is what Santer ran, in essence, before he became the president of the Commission. It just happened to be a sovereign city-state called Luxembourg).

So Europe is in crisis. But it may also (Oh happy fault!) be heading for something better than the rather shabby siding it has been parked on for the past decade or so.

There is nothing like a crisis for bringing change, and there are few human institutions as urgently in need of change as the European Union. Some 350 million people due to be half a billion if the currently planned expansion goes ahead, all of whom live in more or less democratic countries at home, find that a larger and larger chunk of their lives is dominated by a Brussels-based bureaucracy which is undemocratic, unrepresentative, and (in some cases) simply corrupt.

Perhaps now we can move on to a new European culture of transparency and honesty," said Pauline Green, head of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament. And it is the European Parliament, which has been directly elected for almost twenty years but only recently worked up the nerve to challenge the appointed authorities, that will be the main beneficiary of the current upheaval.

The U.S. of E is still a long way off, and even when it comes to pass it won't look much like the U.S. of A. Too many languages, for one thing. Too many strong and separate national traditions, for another. But what the present upheavals are about, at base, is changing an elite project, conceived by dreamers and driven by national governments and bureaucracies, into a responsive and democratic superstate. And the process unfolds, as these things always do, by means of scandal and crisis.

The writer is an independent London-based journalist whose articles are published in 45 countries.

Africa wrestles with Congo conundrum

Africa is plagued by internal wars. One of the worst so far is the Congo conflict which has drawn in eight countries and threatens to become Africa's first continental civil war. It is a tangled situation that will take a lot of unravelling

By Patrick Lejtenyi

HIGH ON the agenda of a unique meeting in Africa of the French foreign minister and Britain's foreign and Commonwealth secretary was the seemingly unending civil war in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (former Zaire).

Hubert Vedrine and Robin Cook are pledging a new era of cooperation in Africa between the continent's two main ex-colonial powers.

They'll have their work cut out for them when it comes to the DRC. It is widely believed that peace in the DRC will not be achieved without the international community's intervention. Only a ceasefire, the withdrawal of foreign troops, multi-party negotiations, and a democratic constitution, all enforced by an international peacekeeping effort, will ensure lasting stability.

The biggest and most immediate obstacle is the presence of foreign troops. Official state armies, foreign-backed rebels and individual militias from eight countries are fighting, each with their own agenda. Peace in Congo is not high on any of them.

The rebels were originally mostly Tutsi, but now include a large number of defectors from President Laurent Kabila's multi-ethnic army. The rebel force is no longer as Tutsi-dominated or foreign as once reported. The opposing sides remain bitterly hostile.

"Cohabitation between the rebels and Kabila will be extremely difficult," says Wivu Kalialia, of the London-based think-tank Congo Forum. "A lot has been said against the Banyamulenge (Congolese Tutsi): 'They are not Congolese, they are foreigners,' and so on. These feelings cannot be erased overnight."

Rwanda insists it is defending its borders from armed bands of Hutu Interahamwe rebels operating out of refugee camps along the border. Uganda says Kabila invited its troops in to operate against Ugandan rebels operating out of eastern Congo.

"Uganda and the DRC mutually agreed over a year before the [Congo] rebellion that Uganda can deploy soldiers in eastern Congo to work as custodians of our western border," says the Ugandan High Commissioner to Britain, George Kirya. "We are there to rebuff our rebels, not to attack. Our troops are all on the defensive, except when we are attacked."

The resource-rich eastern Kivu provinces, meanwhile, remain in Ugandan and Rwandan hands.

Angola and Zimbabwe have sent thousands of troops to prop up Kabila's regime for a variety of reasons. Angola, like Uganda, is trying to crush its own rebellion operating out of the DRC. Zimbabwe's troops are said to be safeguarding President Robert Mugabe's considerable financial investments in the Kabila regime.

A decisive military victory for either side is unlikely, and neither side seems willing to talk. The solution will have to be political, and will have to be imposed from outside.

"Rwanda and Uganda can push the rebels to genuinely commit to negotiate," says Kalialia. "If they put pressure on them they can engage in genuine and fruitful talks. For their part, the governments of Zimbabwe and Angola can tell Kabila, 'There's only so much we can do, we have to deal with important domestic matters.' Then Kabila will find pressure on him to talk seriously to the rebels."

Talks may not end the war, but would at least be steps in the right direction. How they progress will depend on the military situation. "There will be a negotiated settlement, but on whose terms is yet to be determined," says Barrie Collins, a writer for Africa Direct, an organisation researching contemporary African affairs. "The outcome, however, is likely to address the interests of Uganda and Rwanda rather than ensure stability in the Congo."

Rwandan and Ugandan friendship with the West gives them an advantage over Kabila at the international level. Kabila counts only China, Syria, Libya and Cuba as his friends outside the region. He is generally considered a genocidal dictator.

Getting the warring parties to negotiate will be difficult. Not only do the

belligerents distrust each other, there is also no clear rebel leader. Ernest Wamba dia Wamba is the head of the biggest anti-Kabila group, the Congolese Rally for Democracy (RDC), but his authority does not command universal respect.

"There is a certain level of incoherence within the alliance," says Collins. "The tensions between Rwanda and Uganda are reflected in it, and the pecking order within the alliance may be a destabilising factor."

The December uprising in northern Equateur — former dictator Mobutu Sese Seko's home province — has further threatened the alliance's integrity. Jean-Pierre Bemba, the rebel leader there, is the son of a Mobutu crony and is gathering the remnants of Mobutu loyalists under his banner.

"There are money and supplies coming in from Mobutu's former army and friends," says Kalialia. "The Mobutu camp has joined him."

The relationship between the two rebel groups is tense. "It is a marriage of convenience," Kalialia believes. "They are coordinating their efforts, but these two forces are not meant to cohabitate." There have been reports of fighting between the DRC and Bemba's Mouvement de Liberation du Congo (MLC), which was only formed in December.

While there has been considerable

international diplomatic activity surrounding the war, little has been accomplished. "This unprecedented degree of activity demonstrates both the out-of-control nature of the conflict and the limits African regimes face in intervening," says Collins.

While the West tacitly backs the rebels, it has dragged its feet at any concrete efforts towards peace. Malcolm Harper — U.K. Director for the United Nations Association, a U.N. watchdog operating at arm's length from the official organisation — has called the Security Council's attitude towards the conflict "totally unacceptable."

Says Harper: "Part of the tragedy in the Great Lakes region is the Security Council's failure in developing any creative leadership, especially in the way they acted so meekly in withdrawing human rights observers from eastern Congo. They still have not resolved the issue of massive human rights abuses in the refugee camps."

Allegations of mass executions have surfaced from both sides. Charges of genocide fly between the various factions following massacres in South Kivu. Kabila's diatribes against Tutsis have resulted in pogroms in Kinshasa and anti-Tutsi hatred has become a central component in Kabila's speeches. The ethnic issue has become one of the most divisive in the war.

Many analysts would like to see the

presence of an international, neutral peacekeeping force in the region. This would impose enough stability to begin dialogue and ease the transition to civilian control.

"We must let the Congolese population control their own country," says Cissa Wa Numbé Gasson, Secretary-General of the UNA for Congo. "When the foreign armies leave, we must put pressure on Kabila for a debate with the entire opposition to create transitional institutions. We must have a representative transitional government and elections as soon as possible. We must end the era of self-proclaimed presidents."

It remains for the international community to act. A recent initiative by President Frederick Chiluba of Zambia is said to include introduction of a U.N. peacekeeping force, withdrawal of foreign troops and security guarantees for Rwanda and Uganda. The European Union is reported to back the plan.

American, British and South African diplomats are also meeting with government leaders in the region to discuss the war, and Kabila has lifted restrictions against several key opposition figures. Whether these recent developments will lead to peace is debatable. Previous meetings and diplomatic exchanges have come to nothing.

— *Gentini News*

A unique book on a unique city

Amman: The City and its Society
Edited by Jean Hannoyer and Seteney Shami
Amman: CERMOC (Centre d'Etudes et de Recherches sur le Moyen-Orient Contemporain), 1996, 590 pages

THERE ARE numerous books to guide us through Jordan's archaeological treasures, but how many guides are there to the social history and present reality of the capital? How many books take us beyond the building facades to see "who makes city spaces, who uses them and how they are transformed" (p. 40)?

Amman: The City and its Society is a new kind of guide, offering a unique opportunity for "hands-on" learning. Upon reading a chapter on Al Hashimi Plaza, for example, one's first impulse is to go downtown and re-discover the square which we all presume to know so well. Is it true, as Jordan University's Omar M. Amireh writes, that women's presence in the plaza has decreased because the spaces provided for relaxation are not culturally appropriate for them? Can it really be the case that no meaningful play space has been allotted for children?

Another chapter on villa architecture equips us with a new pair of glasses to be worn while cruising West Amman residential areas. Architects Ihsan Fethi and Kamel Mahadin call attention to the structural acrobatics and indiscriminate mixture of styles employed in many villas, without regard for functional or environmental suitability. They suggest that such exhibitionism can be related either to a good sense of humour, or to cultural bankruptcy and egotism. Go out and judge for yourself!

Even more thought-provoking are several chapters on squatter neighbourhoods, and the results of the Urban Development Department (UDD) projects to upgrade them. It is Wadi Hadaddeh, Wadi Rimam, Jofeh, Yajouz and similar areas which best illustrate what anthropologist Seteney Shami writes in the introduction: "Cities are forged and continuously made and remade through struggles over space" (p. 38). These chapters, and others that deal with poverty and unequal access to space, resources and infrastructure, invite us on a walking tour of all parts of the city, to challenge its prevailing division into East and West, into have's and have-not's. Such a tour may include some surprises, as seen in UNICEF Director Leila T. Bisbarat's piece on UDD upgrading of poor quarters. She says there was no plan for creating safe space for children until the project staff insisted on retaining and stabilising existing neighbourhood footpaths. The result was "an example worth replicating in other neighbourhoods of



Amman, including those of the middle class and the wealthy, where no child-friendly footpaths or sidewalks exist at most doorsteps" (p. 562).

Of course, this book was not primarily intended as a guidebook. In actual fact, it is a scholarly volume containing papers presented by some thirty experts at a conference held in Amman in 1993 by CERMOC, the French Centre for Studies and Research on the Contemporary Middle East. It is amazingly comprehensive and moreover trilingual, including papers in English, French and Arabic, methodically organised into sections covering Amman's history; uses of space; questions of family, population and urbanisation; ethnic communities and identity; economy and the distribution of resources; and urban politics and policies.

Interwoven in all these issues is Amman's particular character as a city of migrants, whether Circassian, Damascene, Armenian or Palestinian; and a city whose economic and spatial development has drawn heavily on external financing. This special character led Shami to write: "The particularities of Amman defy standard generalisations about the historical formation of cities, urban morphologies, population structures, political economy, or the social and cultural dynamics of class, community and family" (p. 37).

As such, this book has multiple purposes. While contributing to theories of urbanisation, it is also a rich empirical document to be used by future researchers. Hopefully, it will also be used by city planners, policymakers and administrators who aim for a vibrant city which is equally liveable for all its residents.

Sally Bland

The 71st Academy Awards No clear Oscar winners as shadow of the McCarthy era is cast over awards

By Karen Lowe
Agence France Presse

WITH THE tightest races in years, the 71st Academy Awards could actually be infused with suspense over the winners as well as over the response to an Oscar for director Elia Kazan, shunned since the McCarthy era.

Virtually all of the major categories of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences are pushing handicappers to resort to tarot cards with no clear winner like last year's "Titanic," which swamped the competition.

"By this point," Los Angeles Times film critic Kenneth Turan said, "a consensus has usually emerged among those whose business or hobby it is to predict the eventual winner."

"The favourite doesn't always win, but at least there is one. This year, however, the smart money is scratching its collective head."

Perhaps, the biggest mystery though is whether Academy members at the ceremony at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion will applaud Kazan, 89, whose lifetime achievement award has divided Hollywood and stirred protests.

The award to Kazan, who directed "On the Waterfront," has angered many stars who recall how he destroyed careers when he named names before the House Un-American Activities Committee's infamous probe of communists in Hollywood.

Going into the awards, Steven Spielberg's "Saving Private Ryan" and John Madden's "Shakespeare in Love" are the leading contenders among critics for the most coveted best picture Oscar.

"Ryan" has the sweeping, epic drama appeal that academy members tend to favour, but the question is whether the movie released early in

the year has the staying power to beat out the newer, feel-good "Shakespeare."

For those playing the numbers, the best picture award has gone to the most nominated movie for 14 of the past 15 years. "Shakespeare" won 13 nominations, more than any other contenders.

Even if "Ryan" loses out to "Shakespeare," or "Life is Beautiful" — and even less likely "The Thin Red Line" — most critics are putting their money on Spielberg for best director for the sheer bravura of his work.

Entertainment Weekly gives Spielberg 2-1 odds compared to 3-1 for Madden, though Newsweek puts Spielberg neck-and-neck with Roberto Benigni for his Holocaust tragicomedy "Life is Beautiful."

Terence Malick ("The Thin Red Line") could cause an upset victory with his meditative vision of war, a prospect considered less likely for Madden and Peter Weir ("The Truman Show"). It is usually more of a toss-up for the actors and actresses category and this year even more so, though there seems to be a critics tilt toward Ian McKellen ("Gods and Monsters") and Benigni for best actor. Long shots are Nick Nolte as the small-town cop in "Affliction," Edward Norton as a neo-Nazi skinhead in "American History X" and Tom Hanks, who played Captain Miller in "Saving Private Ryan" and has already won three best actor Oscars.

Though Gwyneth Paltrow has been bathed in a golden glow since "Shakespeare in Love," Cate Blanchett's steely title role in "Elizabeth" caught critics' attention.

Both could face competition from Fernanda Montenegro, who scooped up plaudits for her role as an embittered woman whose heart is

thawed by a 10-year-old boy in "Central Station."

The long shot is Emily Watson ("Hillary and Jackie").

Montenegro's performance also helped put the Brazilian "Central Station" up for best foreign-language film against the favoured "Life is Beautiful" (Italy). The three other contenders are "Tango" (Argentina), "The Grandfather" (Spain) and "Children of Heaven" (Iran).

Kathy Bates ("Primary Colors") and Lynn Redgrave ("Gods and Monsters") are the favourites for best supporting actress over Brenda Blethyn ("Little Voice") and Rachel Griffiths ("Hilary and Jackie").

For best supporting actor, Geoffrey Rush ("Shakespeare") is about the only one critics have ruled out. It's a four-way race between Billy Bob Thornton ("A Simple Plan"), Robert Duval ("A Civil Action"), James Coburn ("Affliction"), and Ed Harris ("The Truman Show").



Meanwhile, elsewhere in California... 'Burn Hollywood Burn' awarded worst film of the year prize

By Arthur Spiegelman
Reuters

GODZILLA AND the Spice Girls can relax: their failed film efforts of 1998 may have been bad, but they were not bad enough to be named the worst film of the year.

An Alan Smithee film: "Burn Hollywood Burn" won the 19th annual Razzie Award for worst film of the year on Saturday — a tongue-in-cheek prize traditionally handed out by the Golden Raspberry Award Foundation a day before Hollywood honours its best at the Oscars.

But neither Spice Girls nor Godzilla emerged unscathed.

The British pop group was collectively named worst actress of the year for its debut film "Spice World," while Godzilla, the Japanese monster who tries to destroy big cities, was in a three-way tie for worst remake of the year with "The Avengers" and "Psycho." Bruce Willis was named the worst actor for all the films he starred in during the year: "Armageddon," "Mercury Rising" and "The Siege." Willis was not the only big-name star to raise

'The British pop group [Spice Girls] was collectively named worst actress of the year for its debut film 'Spice World'

Razzie ire.
Leonardo DiCaprio, the star of "Titanic," was named worst new screen couple of the year for his portrayal of twins in "The Man in the Iron Mask." "Burn Hollywood Burn," a critically hammered tale of a director trying to sabotage a film his producers have mangled, also won three other awards for its main beguiling, high-priced screenwriter Joe Eszterhas.

He was named author of the worst screenplay, worst new star and worst supporting actor. He shared the last distinction with talk show host Jerry Springer, who appeared in "Ringmaster." The worst original song came from "Burn Hollywood Burn." It is called "I Wanna Be Mike Ovitz" and is a 73-second tribute to the powerful Hollywood deal-maker.

A Razzies spokesman said Eszterhas' four awards set a record, beating the three awards given last year to Kevin Costner for "The Postman" and the three once won by Sylvester Stallone.

Eszterhas seized control of the movie from Arthur Hiller after a disastrous preview and Hiller's demand that the director's credit read "By Alan Smithee," the name directors use when they do not want to be associated with a work.

Gus Van Sant was named the worst director of the year for his scene-for-scene remake of Alfred Hitchcock's "Psycho," and Maria Pitillo was named worst supporting actress for her work in "Godzilla." The Razzie award is a golf-ball-sized plastic raspberry atop a reel of super 8 film that has been spray-painted gold.

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Business & Finance

Jordan Times, Sunday, March 21, 1999 9

HOROSCOPE

FORECAST FOR SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 1998

By Linda C. Black, Tribune Media Services, Inc.

ARIES: (March 21 to April 19) Something you want for your home might be right in your own garage, or else your parents' garage. It may be an older item that can be fixed up and turned into something better you can buy. A little bit of work is required, but that's OK. You're good at that sort of thing.

TAURUS: (April 20 to May 20) A question that's been nagging at the back of your mind will finally get resolved. It could lead to another question, though. Just take your time and think things out carefully. There will be pressure on you to make a quick decision, but that wouldn't work very well, so don't go for that option. If all else fails, stall.

GEMINI: (May 21 to June 21) Money is coming into your account, possibly from an older person or parent. If it's for tuition, you'd better not use it to run off to Europe. You could find yourself in a world of hurt. Maybe you can come up with a way to do both. With permission, of course.

CANCER: (June 22 to July 21) It looks like an older person won't do what you want. He or she insists on being in control. Don't bring up something you know this person will get upset about, if you can possibly help it. Milk and cookies will be more effective than just about anything you can say.

LEO: (July 22 to August 21) However, you might feel like travelling this weekend, it's not really a very good idea. It's better time to balance your chequebook and pay your bills. There may be a couple of unpleasant surprises in that pile of paperwork. Better clean it out before it gets any worse.

VIRGO: (August 22 to September 22) You might not feel much like playing, if everybody else knows the game and you don't. There's no need to worry. You'll learn quickly. It's a friend who's in danger of making a silly mistake this afternoon. If you can see it coming, say something.

LIBRA: (September 23 to October 22) An older woman needs something you

can provide. She'd do just about anything for you, so bow about returning the favour? She's not going to ask you for a thing, however. If you ask, don't be surprised if she says "Nothing." Don't take "Nothing" for an answer.

SCORPIO: (October 23 to November 21) Travel by water would be best. If you can't actually be on the water, being next to it also works. If you can't even be next to it, playing tapes of ocean sounds would be a distant third. Actually, even that would be very romantic, with the right person by your side. Make it happen.

SAGITTARIUS: (November 22 to December 21) Funding should be relatively easy to get, even for an expensive item. If you're stressed about having to make such a big commitment, relax. You don't have to do it until you're ready. Your shopping may take longer than expected. Schedule a fancy dinner date for tomorrow instead.

CAPRICORN: (December 22 to January 20) You and your mate have more than enough items on your lists. In fact, you have too many. Maybe you can solve the problem by taking off in two different directions, then meeting up later tonight. You'll get twice done in half the time.

AQUARIUS: (January 21 to February 19) You could make some extra money, but it won't be easy. It's a chore you don't like and would just as soon delegate to somebody else. If you can talk someone else into doing it for less money than you'd charge, go ahead. Management counts as work too, you know. You're a natural.

PISCES: (February 20 to March 20) Schedule an early date with a person you want to know better. This doesn't have to be a new friend. It could be somebody you already know very well. You don't have to do much talking, either. A concert, at the theatre or in the privacy of your own home, would be perfect.

Birthstone of March:
Aquamarine — Jasper

Asian cities world's most costly despite financial crisis, survey says

Amman ranks 27th

GENEVA (AP) — Cost of living for expatriates in selected cities, as surveyed by private consultancy, Corporate Resources Group. Index given as a whole number, with fractions omitted; ties indicated by dash. New York is baseline of 100 for comparison.

GENEVA (AP) — Despite Asian financial turmoil, Tokyo and four other cities in Japan and China have the world's highest cost of living for foreigners, according to an annual survey.

Besides Moscow in sixth place and London in 8th, all the top 10 cities were in Asia. The least expensive cities were Madras, India, in 148th place; Volgograd, Russia, 149; Blantyre, Malawi, 150; and Harare, Zimbabwe, 151.

The cost-of-living report, which is intended for use by governments and corporations, was based on a survey conducted last autumn, said the Corporate Resources Group, a division of the consultant William M. Mercer Companies.

Seoul led the Asian cities that have been recovering from economic problems. The South Korean capital climbed from 48th place a year ago to 10th, Jakarta, Bangkok, Kuala Lumpur and Manila also showed signs of recovery, the survey showed.

The firm checked the prices of housing, food, clothes, utilities, transportation and entertainment. Some 15 cities ranked higher than New York City, which was taken as the base with an index of 100.

New York climbed from 21st place last year to 16th because of moderate inflation, a slight increase in real estate prices and the strength of the dollar. Chicago was in 53rd place, Miami 54th, San Francisco 58th, Los Angeles 60th and Honolulu 62nd.

Houston was 71st, Washington, D.C., 72nd and Boston 74th. The company said the gap between the most and least expensive cities had widened to 143.8 points, compared with 114 points last spring.

Most major European cities ranked below New York, thanks to the strong value of the U.S. dollar, the company said.

1. Tokyo 165
2. Hong Kong 153
3. Beijing 152
4. Osaka, Japan 144
5. Shanghai, China 140
6. Moscow 128
7. Guangzhou, China 121
8. London 112
9. Shenzhen, China 109
10. Seoul, South Korea 108
11. Geneva 108
12. Zurich, Switzerland 107
13. Singapore 106
14. St. Petersburg, Russia 102
15. Taipei, Taiwan 100
16. New York 100
17. Oslo, Norway 99
18. Copenhagen 99
19. Vienna 98
20. Paris 98
21. Buenos Aires, Argentina 98
22. Tehran, Iran 98
23. Cairo, Egypt 97
24. Sao Paulo, Brazil 95
25. Libreville, Gabon 94
26. Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates 94
27. Amman, Jordan 94
28. Warsaw, Poland 93
29. Dalian, China 93
30. Hanoi, Vietnam 92
31. Milan, Italy 92
32. Riyadh, Saudi Arabia 92
33. Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam 91
34. Kuwait 91
35. Helsinki, Finland 91
36. Almaty, Kazakhstan 91
37. Riga, Latvia 89
38. Douala, Cameroon 89
39. Rio de Janeiro 89
40. Tel Aviv, Israel 89
41. Jeddah, Saudi Arabia 88
42. Berlin 88
43. Duesseldorf, Germany 88
44. Munich 88
45. Kingston, Jamaica 87
46. Manama, Bahrain 87
47. Frankfurt, Germany 87
48. Luxembourg 87
49. Dubai, United Arab Emirates 87
50. Dublin, Ireland 86
51. Ludwigschafen, Germany 86
52. Abidjan, Ivory Coast 86
53. Chicago 86
54. Miami 86
55. Brussels 85
56. Hamburg, Germany 85
57. Rome 85
58. San Francisco 85
59. Istanbul, Turkey 85
60. Los Angeles 85
61. San Juan, Puerto Rico 85
62. Honolulu 84
63. Tianjin, China 83
64. Caracas, Venezuela 82
65. Prague, Czech Republic 82
66. White Plains, New York 82
67. Stockholm, Sweden 82
68. Casablanca, Morocco 81
69. Amsterdam 81
70. Glasgow, Scotland 80
71. Houston 80
72. Washington, D.C. 80
73. Zagreb, Croatia 80
74. Boston 80
75. Birmingham, England 80
76. Madrid, Spain 80
77. Tallinn, Estonia 79
78. Athens, Greece 79
79. Lyon, France 79
80. Leipzig, Germany 79
81. Barcelona, Spain 78
82. Dakar, Senegal 78
83. Budapest, Hungary 78
84. Guatemala City, Guatemala 78
85. Morristown, New Jersey 78
86. Detroit 77
87. Lisbon, Portugal 77
88. Ljubljana, Slovenia 76
89. Panama City, Panama 76
90. Nairobi, Kenya 75
91. St. Louis 75
92. Sofia, Bulgaria 75
93. Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei 75
94. Belgrade, Yugoslavia 75
95. Denver 74
96. Jakarta, Indonesia 74
97. Montevideo, Uruguay 74
98. Santiago, Chile 74
99. Bangkok, Thailand 74
100. Bratislava, Slovakia 73

101. Minneapolis 73
102. Sydney, Australia 72
103. Lagos, Nigeria 72
104. Kiev, Ukraine 71
105. Bucharest, Romania 71
106. Seattle 71
107. Accra, Ghana 70
108. Atlanta 70
109. Bombay, India 70
110. Pittsburgh 70
111. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia 70
112. New Delhi, India 69
113. Monterrey, Mexico 69
114. Toronto 69
115. Dhaka, Bangladesh 69
116. Cleveland 68
117. Limassol, Cyprus 67
118. Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic 67
119. Winston-Salem, North Carolina 67
120. Manila, Philippines 67
121. Lima, Peru 67
122. Lexington, Kentucky 66
123. Melbourne, Australia 66
124. Portland, Oregon 66
125. Tunis, Tunisia 66
126. San Jose, Costa Rica 66
127. Auckland, New Zealand 65
128. Mexico City 65
129. Adelaide, Australia 64
130. Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan 63
131. Wellington, New Zealand 63
132. Vancouver 63
133. Brisbane, Australia 62
134. Yangon, Myanmar 62
135. Bogota, Colombia 61
136. Vilnius, Lithuania 61
137. Colombo, Sri Lanka 60
138. Algiers, Algeria 59
139. Montreal 59
140. Perth, Australia 59
141. Lusaka, Zambia 59
142. Calgary, Alberta 56
143. Asuncion, Paraguay 55
144. Karachi, Pakistan 52
145. Johannesburg, South Africa 51
146. Quito, Ecuador 48
147. Bangalore, India 47
148. Madras, India 46
149. Volgograd, Russia 37
150. Blantyre, Malawi 33
151. Harare, Zimbabwe 43

Nokia raises profits 74%

HELSINKI (AFP) — Finnish telecommunications giant Nokia increased pre-tax profits in 1998 by 74 per cent to 14,603 billion Finnish marks (\$2.475 billion euros, \$2.82 billion), the group has said.

Sales rose by 51 per cent from the figure for 1997 to 79,231 billion Finnish marks. The results were boosted by mobile telephone sales, which rose by 74 per cent, to 47.98 billion marks. Announcing the results, Nokia's chief executive Jorma Ollila repeated that the group was aiming for a sales growth target of 25 to 35 per cent in 1999.

However, in the European Union, sales growth was three per cent, with sales rising 13 per cent in Spain and Sweden, the association said. This "helped the Scotch whisky industry to alleviate the difficult economic conditions faced elsewhere in the world," a statement said. Hugh Morrison, director general of the Scotch Whisky Association, said "the industry warned throughout 1998

Scotch whisky exports fall 15% in 1998

LONDON (AFP) — Export value of Scotch whisky fell 15 per cent amid difficult trading conditions in 1998, largely due to the Asian crisis, the Scotch Whisky Association has said. The trade group said that 2,030 billion pounds (\$3,248 billion) worth was sold, down 15 per cent from the previous year. In volume, 254.2 million litres of pure alcohol were sold, down eight per cent.

However, in the European Union, sales growth was three per cent, with sales rising 13 per cent in Spain and Sweden, the association said.

This "helped the Scotch whisky industry to alleviate the difficult economic conditions faced elsewhere in the world," a statement said.

Hugh Morrison, director general of the Scotch Whisky Association, said "the industry warned throughout 1998

that it faced highly unusual circumstances — economic difficulties in developing markets and a strong pound."

In 1999, there are signs of improving economic conditions, particularly in the badly hit Asian markets. In addition, the industry has already this year seen the World Trade Organisation back its fight against tax discrimination in South Korea," he concluded.

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NTL BK	1.480	1.420	-2.07%
BAK OF JORDAN	1.320	1.280	-3.03%
INDUSTRIAL DEV. BK	1.400	1.380	-1.43%
THE HOUSING BK	2.830	2.790	-1.41%
JO. KUWAIT BK	1.550	1.570	+1.29%
JO. GULF BK	0.650	0.650	0.00%
ARAB JO. INVEST. BK	2.250	2.100	-6.67%
AL. EXCH. BK	1.250	1.270	+1.60%
JO. INVEST. BK	1.350	1.300	-3.70%
BEIT EL MAL	0.670	0.630	-5.97%
PHILADELPHIA BK	0.520	0.520	0.00%
RANKS INDEX			
	285.360		-0.80%
INSURANCE			
JO. INS	2.900	2.900	0.00%
JERUSALEM INS	1.300	1.300	0.00%
JO. FRENCH INS	2.650	2.700	+1.89%
ABUJA INS	1.000	1.050	+5.00%
INSURANCE INDEX			
	126.680		+0.94%
SERVICES			
ELECTRIC POWER	1.670	1.640	-1.80%
VEHICLES OWNERS	2.060	2.000	-2.91%
ARAB INTL. HOTELS	4.950	4.740	-4.24%
PORTFOLIO SECURITIES	0.250	0.250	0.00%
JO. INTL. TRADING CENT	0.250	0.230	-8.00%
AL. RAY	7.050	7.080	+0.43%
AD-DUSTUR	5.880	5.400	-8.16%
AL. ZARGA FOR EDU	1.000	0.990	-1.00%
ARAB INTL. FOR INVS & EDU	1.220	1.150	-5.74%
UNIVERS. AND TRAVEL	1.130	1.020	-9.73%
UNITED FOR FINANCIAL INVS	1.050	1.080	+2.86%
SERVICES INDEX			
	111.480		-1.93%
INDUSTRY			
CEMENT	3.750	3.640	-2.93%
PHOSPHATE	2.300	2.280	-0.87%
ARAB POTASH	4.200	4.180	-0.48%
PETROLEUM REFINERY	10.800	10.850	+0.46%
JO. TANNING	5.400	5.500	+1.85%
THE IND. COM. & AGRICU	1.080	1.020	-5.56%
WORSTED MILLS	5.450	5.380	-1.28%
ARAB PHARMACEUTICAL	3.070	2.900	-5.54%
CHOCOLATE IND	1.280	1.280	0.00%
JO. DAIRY	2.950	2.950	0.00%
TOBACCO & CIGARET	1.520	1.470	-3.29%
PAPER & CARDBOARD	1.900	1.890	-0.53%
JO. PAPER	0.550	0.550	0.00%
ARAB CHEMICAL DETERGENT	7.350	7.300	-0.68%
NTL. STEEL	0.950	0.910	-4.32%
DAR AL DAWA	6.150	5.890	-4.23%
JO. STEEL	0.550	0.550	0.00%
MIDDLE EAST COMPLEX	1.000	0.990	-1.00%
ARAB ALUMINIUM	1.720	1.680	-2.33%
CHLORINE	1.180	1.180	0.00%
LIVESTOCK & POULTRY	0.400	0.390	-2.50%
NTL. IND	0.270	0.250	-7.41%
PETRO. CHEMICAL	1.100	1.080	-1.82%
CHEMICAL & VEGETABLE OIL	1.010	0.980	-3.04%
UNIVERSAL CHEMICAL	0.910	0.910	0.00%
NTL. CABLE	0.430	0.420	-2.33%
SULPHO. CHEMICALS	1.250	1.240	-0.80%
ARAB CENTER FOR PHARM	0.410	0.510	+24.39%
KAWTHER	1.270	1.280	+0.79%
EL-ZAV	0.620	0.580	-6.45%
UNIVERSAL MODERN IND	1.000	1.000	0.00%
FOOD FACTORIES	0.430	0.420	-2.33%
IND. RESOURCES	0.370	0.360	-2.71%
NEW CAPLES	0.370	0.360	-2.71%
NTL. ALUMINIUM	0.930	0.790	-15.27%
INDUSTRY INDEX			
	96.520		-0.39%
PARALLEL			
EXPORT BK 75%	0.950	0.930	-2.11%
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SPORTS IN BRIEF

Zabel furious after blood test

MILAN (AFP) — German cyclist Erik Zabel was furious after being forced to undergo a blood test in the early hours of Saturday morning as he rested before the next stage of the Milan to San Remo race, the ANSA agency reported. The Telekom team rider and members of the Festina, ONCE and Lotto teams were woken in their hotel rooms at 4:30 a.m. Zabel said: "This is a provocation, because even if I underwent similar tests a few years ago, they at least had the good grace to not wake me until 6:00 a.m." Race officials said all the tested riders' blood tests showed allowable levels of red blood cells.

Olympic Order for balloon heroes

LAUSANNE (AFP) — Bertrand Piccard and Brian Jones, who flew into the record books Saturday as the first balloonists to travel non-stop around the world, are to be awarded the Olympic Order. "The IOC want to congratulate these two pioneers for their great success," said International Olympic Committee president Juan Antonio Samaranch. "We will have a ceremony in the Olympic museum shortly," he added. Breitling Orbiter III — the giant silver balloon as tall as a 20-storey building — crossed 9.27 degrees west longitude over Western Sahara at 0954 GMT Saturday, achieving ballooning's last great challenge. The epic journey, which began in the Swiss Alps on March 1, took 19 days, one hour and 49 minutes.

Women's football to have bigger role

LAUSANNE (AFP) — Women's football is going to play a bigger role in future Olympics declared Sepp Blatter, the head of football's ruling body, here on Saturday. The FIFA president revealed that the number of women's teams is to be increased from eight to 12 for the 2004 Games in Athens. "Women's football is becoming more and more important. We have also increased the size of each squad from 16 to 18," said Blatter after a meeting of the summer Olympic sports federations. He added that a special conference into women's football will be held in Los Angeles in July during the Women's World Cup.

Dimitrov tests positive

SOFIA (AFP) — The International Amateur Athletics Federation's medical commission said Friday that a second test on Bulgarian triple jumper Rostislav Dimitrov during the world indoor championships in Japan last month had proved positive for ephedrine. He has stripped of his silver medal although the test result is yet to be confirmed officially. Dimitrov, 20, will escape a long-term ban as ephedrine is not on the IAAF's list of category A banned substances. On Thursday, Ukrainian shot putter Vita Pavlysh was banned from competition for two years by her national athletics federation after failing a dope test at the same meeting.

SCOREBOARD

NBA		
Indiana	96	Chicago 87
Philadelphia	105	LA Lakers 90
Toronto	93	LA Clippers 82
Atlanta	93	Phoenix 85
Charlotte	83	Utah 82 (OT)
Detroit	94	Dallas 87
Minnesota	105	Denver 101
Portland	90	San Antonio 85
Golden State	90	Seattle 78

Dutch League

FC Twente	2	NEC Nijmegen	0
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Portuguese League

Boavista	1	Vitoria Setubal	1
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Belgian League

Standard Liege	3	FC Brugge	0
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French League

Bastia	1	Nancy	2
Nantes	0	Monaco	1

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♥ J10
♦ Q42
♣ Q985

SOUTH
♠ AK7
♥ AK7432
♦ 63
♣ 32

The bidding:
WEST 1♠ NORTH Pass
Pass 3♠ Pass 4NT
Pass 5♠ Pass

Opening lead: King of ♠

There are light opening bids and there are insinuations. In our view, North's opening bid crossed the line into the latter area and was directly to blame for the debacle that ensued. South must be held blameless. With the two up honors in opener's suit and a six-card suit headed by the ace-king, which partner happily supported, South surely thought there was a better chance of missing a grand slam than possibly going down at the five-level.

West got the defense off to a brilliant start by choosing to lead the king of diamonds, planting in declarer's mind that it was supported by another touching high honor, probably the ace. At trick two West shifted to the seven of clubs. Declarer was at the crossroads. Was West underleading the ace or the queen of clubs? If East held both missing high honors, the contract was going down no matter what declarer did.

South reasoned that it was impossible for West to have the ace of clubs. If West held the ace of clubs and diamond length headed by the ace-king, quite likely that defender would have opened the bidding with a one-bid. If the diamonds were headed by king-queen, the 10 missing diamonds suggested West would probably have enough length to open with a weak two-bid in the suit.

That convinced South that the ace of clubs was with East. Therefore, declarer inserted dummy's jack. East won with the queen and returned the suit to partner's ace — down one.

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Pan-Arab Games meeting reviews preparations, charts plans for short-term agenda

By Aileen Bannayan

AMMAN — HRH Prince Faisal, the newly-designated head of the Higher Committee of the Pan-Arab Games chaired a meeting Saturday in which officials had a general review of preparations so far and short-term plans for the Aug. 15-31 event.

The meeting reviewed construction work completed to date, maintenance at various venues as well as equipment needed for the event which will bring together 3,000 athletes from 17 countries confirmed so far.

The Higher Committee meeting set out the plan of action for the coming phase which includes finalising the number of participating countries; events and venues of competition; and preparing Jordan's teams and athletes.

Deputy Prime Minister Ayman Majali, head of the Ministerial Committee following up the Games, underlined that all involved officials and sectors would spare no effort to make the 9th Pan-Arab Games a success and worthy of carrying the name Al Hussein Tournament.

Palestine's confirmation of participation brought the number of countries to 17. They are, in addition to the host, Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Algeria, Kuwait, Qatar, Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Yemen and Sudan. Oman and Lebanon have not finalised the nature of their participation,

and organisers are still awaiting initial word from the UAE and Bahrain.

A total of eight events out of the preliminary number of 26 was expected to be scrapped since the minimum number of participating teams in any sport should not be less than five teams for men and four for women.

The 8th Pan Arab Games in Beirut had 19 countries taking part in 20 sports events.

According to officials, belated confirmation by some countries was mainly due to the preference of professional athletes to participate in the World Athletics Championships which coincide with the Pan-Arab Games. Officials expected the strain between Gulf countries and Iraq to also affect the Games.

The Amman Games will be followed by the first Arab Paralympics. On Friday, HRH Prince Firas Ben Ra'd was named as director of the Paralympics which will be held Sept. 9-20.

Last week, Minister of Sports and Youth Mohammad Kheir Mamsar surprised observers when he named Bassam Haroun as the new director of the Hussein Tournament replacing Isam Aridah who held the post since Jordan was named host country.

The timing and the move surprised most observers including members of the Higher Organising Committee which had recom-

mended Aridah's appointment by then head of the committee HRH Prince Abdullah.

Aridah, was hailed by officials as the man for the job, after many years of service as head of the Hussein Youth City before his appointment as secretary general of the Ministry of Culture and Youth and later on advisor at the Prime Ministry.

He spearheaded the campaign to bring in more funding, set up an Internet site for the Games and worked to assure that the building of sports facilities is concluded on time.

Haroun, who was deputy chairman of the Games Technical Committee, took over the top job overseeing the many subcommittees organising the event at a crucial time with officials and subcommittees calling for urgent measures to prepare for the Games which has so far received only \$500,000 in sponsorship from the Council of Arab Sports Ministers.

However, one of the major obstacles facing the Games was solved last week when UAE TV announced that it would lend Jordan Television the necessary equipment to cover the event after it was estimated that JTV needed JD6 million to acquire its own equipment.

The resolving of the coverage issue paved the way for the signing of the promotion and marketing rights agreement

with the Saudi firm RAF for \$1.5 million paid to Jordan in addition to 70 per cent of any additional income.

Officials say construction work is on schedule, mainly the JD4 million multi-purpose indoor stadium with a 7,000-seat capacity, and the Olympic-size swimming pool which has come under heavy criticism for not being covered to be utilised in winter.

However, work on the track and field stadium, in addition to installing and upgrading facilities with electronic timing machines and other requirements was said to be moving at a slower pace.

Moreover, JOC officials have expressed concern that a host of administrative and organisational issues seem to have overshadowed the lax attitude of some federations overseeing the training of athletes — a key priority as host country.

The Jordanian government had initially earmarked JD18 million for the event and additional sponsorship for Jordan's bid was secured by exempting Jordan from the 50 per cent Arab Sports Federation margin of profit on promotion and television coverage.

I should have gone after Barcelona Games — Samaranch

BARCELONA (AFP) — International Olympic Committee (IOC) president Juan Antonio Samaranch, reeling from the corruption scandal which has damaged the organisation, has admitted he should have stepped down after the 1992 Barcelona Games.

"It's very difficult to reach a position of such responsibility as I now have. But the most difficult thing is to quit at the right time. I didn't do that and that was a mistake," Samaranch told Saturday's Barcelona daily La Vanguardia.

"I always thought that the moment to go would come after Barcelona once that dream (of seeing the Games held in the capital of his native Catalonia) had been realised," said Samaranch.

"But there was an important stage to get through afterwards — the IOC centenary — and that made it four more years. Then, in 1997, I convinced myself I should carry on," he added.

The 78-year-old Samaranch last Wednesday won a sweeping vote of confidence from IOC members to carry on until the end of his term in 2001 and put the IOC back on an even keel after the expulsion of six members embroiled in the Salt Lake City bribes-for-votes scandal.

"Now it is easy to speak after the event, after this storm. Perhaps four months ago I would not have said what I am saying now," said Samaranch, clearly chastened by the scandal, which he said had comprised "undoubtedly the worst moment of my Olympic career."

Rejuvenated Hornets sting Jazz in overtime

CHARLOTTE (R) — Karl Malone missed an open 20-footer just before the buzzer, allowing the revitalised Charlotte Hornets to escape with an 83-82 overtime victory over the Utah Jazz for their fifth straight home win.

Charlotte snapped Utah's six-game winning streak and improved to 4-3 under interim coach Paul Silas.

All five Hornets starters scored in double figures, led by Elden Campbell with 19 points and 12 rebounds and David Wesley with 16 points.

"We had a golden opportunity tonight," Campbell said.

"When you take a team like that into overtime, you know you have a chance to win." The Hornets (8-14) scored the final eight points of regulation. With Utah ahead 75-73, Wesley drove the lane and dished to Campbell, who slammed it home with 8.4 seconds left.

The Midwest Division-leading Jazz (19-5) had a chance to win, but Stockton's jumper bounced off the rim and Malone's follow was slapped away by Eddie Jones forcing overtime. Malone made just 5-of-21 shots and Stockton was 2-of-10.

Said Wesley: "We just kept getting big plays from different guys. When you play hard and aggressive, you always have a chance to win."

The Hornets never trailed in the extra session, scoring the first four points on layups by Campbell and Wesley.

"They looked like they wanted to play more and win and that's what happened," Jazz coach Jerry Sloan said.

In Portland, the Trail Blazers were without their leading scorer but continued to prove that they are for real.

Arvydas Sabonis scored 13 of his season-high 28 points in the fourth quarter



Dallas Mavericks Robert Pack (R) attempts to block Detroit Pistons Grant Hill during the second quarter at the Palace in Auburn Hills (Reuters photo)

and Damon Stoudamire made four big free throws in the waning seconds as Portland snapped the San Antonio Spurs' nine-game winning streak with a 90-85 victory.

The Pacific-leading Blazers (19-5) tied Utah for the best record in the Western Conference.

Iverson scored 41 points, upstaging Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant, as the 76ers won for fourth time in five games.

Tim Duncan had 29 points and 15 rebounds for the Spurs.

In Philadelphia, Allen Iverson's eighth career 40-point game helped the 76ers defeat the Los Angeles Lakers 105-90.

Iverson scored 41 points, upstaging Shaquille O'Neal and Kobe Bryant, as the 76ers won for fourth time in five games.

Lakers forward Dennis Rodman missed his fourth straight game due to an excused absence for personal reasons.

With Rodman, Los Angeles is 9-0. Without him, 8-9.

In Indianapolis, the Indiana Pacers held the Chicago Bulls scoreless for the first five minutes of

the fourth quarter on the way to a 96-87 victory.

Reggie Miller scored 31 points for the Central Division-leading Pacers. Toni Kukoc had 29 points for Chicago.

At Golden State, Erick Dampier collected 19 points and 13 rebounds and helped the Golden State Warriors beat the Seattle SuperSonics 90-78.

Seattle's Gary Payton opened the game with a 3-pointer before Golden State scored 16 straight points to take command.

At Detroit, Jud Buechler came off the bench to make three crucial 3-pointers down the stretch as the Pistons snapped a three-game losing skid with a 94-87 win over the Dallas Mavericks.

"I was pumped up," said Buechler. "I wanted to enjoy it, get the crowd fired up and get my teammates fired up." In Atlanta, the defensive-minded Hawks held the Phoenix Suns scoreless for more than six minutes and Alan Henderson scored eight of his 15 points during the decisive run that led to a 93-85 victory.

Atlanta, which came in tied with Miami for the best scoring defence at 83.3 points per game, held Phoenix to 35 per cent shooting. The Suns were third in the NBA in scoring at 97.5.

In Toronto, the Toronto Raptors matched the longest winning streak in franchise history with a 93-82 win over the 1-22 Los Angeles Clippers.

Rookie Vince Carter led Toronto (10-12) with 26 points.

In Denver, Joe Smith scored 21 points, including four free throws in the final 85 seconds, as the Minnesota Timberwolves halted a four-game skid with a 105-101 win over the Nuggets.

Kevin Garnett led the way with 28 points for Minnesota.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

In view of the official period of mourning of three months being observed by the Royal Court on the sad demise of His Majesty King Hussein Bin Talal, the Embassy of Pakistan will not be holding a reception on the National Day of Pakistan (23 March 1999). An appropriate reception will be held on the Independence Day of Pakistan (14 August 1999).

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Arafat to seek formula for independent state

Agencies

PALESTINIAN PRESIDENT Yasser Arafat said Saturday he will seek a formula allowing him to declare an independent state on May 4, and appealed for help from the United States and Russia to force Israel into abiding by past agreements so the peace process can be led out of its dark dead end.

Speaking to a congress of Greece's governing Socialist Party, Arafat said the "legal vacuum of sovereignty" following the end of the five-year interim period of Palestinian autonomy will have to be filled.

"As you know the Palestinian people are continuing their just and legal struggle for their national rights of return and self determination, and for the establishment of the independent Palestinian state with Holy Jerusalem as its capital," Arafat told a cheering crowd of about 6,000.

Arafat was here as part of a tour to gain international support for eventual independence. He will make various European stops before talks on March 23 with President

Clinton in Washington on the statehood issue.

"In front of the dead end which the peace process finds itself today, we appeal to all peace loving powers and especially to the co-guarantors of peace, the United States and Russia, and the European Union, to put forward all efforts to convince the Israeli government to abide by all the agreements," he said.

His visit here was an added boost for Premier Costas Simitis at a crucial congress that will vote on the party's leadership on Sunday. He has already managed to gain the upper hand during the four-day congress, and appears certain to be re-elected as leader by 5,800 delegates.

Simitis managed to quench a nearly open revolt by critics questioning his leadership, and stalwarts seeking to preserve the party's welfare-state roots. Even one of his highest critics, Defence Minister Akis Tsochazopoulos, did not question his leadership during a speech Saturday.

Tsochazopoulos narrowly lost to Simitis during the last party congress following the death in 1996 of the party

founder, Andreas Papandreu.

Arafat also bolstered Simitis among the party's old guard by calling him the natural successor of Papandreu, who assisted his Palestine Liberation Organisation by sending ships in August 1982 to evacuate his fighters from Beirut, Lebanon, following the Israeli invasion. Arafat, a close friend of Papandreu's, was one of the last people to see the late premier before his death.

"After the epoch of the resistance in Beirut in 1982, they will forever remain engraved in the collective memory of the Palestinians," Arafat said.

Arafat will visit Sweden on Sunday as part of a European tour aimed at bolstering the Middle East peace process, a Swedish official said on Saturday.

"Arafat's visit will be about the peace process and what Europe can do to help," foreign ministry spokeswoman Helena Bothorp told Reuters.

She said that Arafat would arrive from Austria and travel on to France before heading to the United States.



SENEGALISE ART NEAR THE LOUVRE: Parisians look at 'Little Big Horn,' one of 68 sculptures by Ousmane Sow of Senegal on display at the Pont des Arts over the Seine river in Paris. The Louvre museum is visible in background (AP photo)

U.N. chief preparing for transfer of Lockerbie bombing suspects

UNITED NATIONS (R) — U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan, sounding optimistic, said he was making arrangements to transfer for trial in the Netherlands two Libyan suspects accused of the 1988 Pan Am airliner bombing over Scotland.

He issued a statement and spoke to reporters late on Friday after receiving a letter from Libya that agreed to the surrender of the two men to the United Nations by April 6, the first time a specific date had been mentioned.

Saying he was "greatly encouraged by this development," Annan said necessary arrangements were being initiated for the handover, which Security Council resolutions say are the responsibility of his office.

"I think it has taken a while but it looks as if we are there," he said after his meeting with Abu Omar Dorda, Libya's U.N. ambassador who delivered the letter.

The letter appeared to meet U.S. and British conditions for the lifting of U.N. sanctions, imposed against Libya in 1992 and tightened in 1993. They include a fight and arms embargo and a ban on certain kinds of oil equipment.

The United States and Britain say they have convinc-

ing evidence the two men — Abdul Basset Ali Mohammad Al Megrahi and Lamen Khalifa Fhimah — planted the bomb that blew up Pan Am Flight 103 over the Scottish town of Lockerbie on Dec. 21, 1988, killing 270 people in the air and on the ground.

The news was first announced in Tripoli on Friday by South African President Nelson Mandela, who along with Saudi Arabian leaders had been instrumental in persuading Libya to extradite the two intelligence agents for trial before a Scottish court sitting in the Netherlands.

Dorda said the transfer of the two men had been worked out by U.N. legal counsel, Hans Corell, and authorities in Tripoli and were being kept confidential.

Several months ago, U.N. sources said arrangements had been made for an aircraft to stand by in Italy, fly to Libya and then transport the two men to Camp Zeist, a former military base in the Netherlands. But it was not certain this plan was still in place.

U.S. and British officials were apprehensive that the official letter would contain new conditions. But the text, released on Friday, appeared straightforward, giving hope that the 10-year campaign by

the United States and Britain to try the suspects might be drawing to a close.

Peter Burleigh, the chief U.S. representative at the United Nations, said: "The key is the turning over of the two accused to the United Nations for transport to the Netherlands for a Scottish trial. We've been looking for a date, but more important than the date is the actual turnover."

State Department spokesman James Foley said the United States welcomed "the news that we have heard from President Mandela today. We are expecting the turnover of the two suspects to custody in the Netherlands on or before April 6."

The letter to Annan from Tripoli's foreign minister, Omar Mustafa Montasser, said Libya "agrees to ensure that the two suspects would be available for the secretary-general of the United Nations to take custody of them on or before 6 April 1999 for their appearance before the court."

It said that Libya expected the sanctions to be frozen when the two men reached the Netherlands. U.N. Security Council resolutions automatically suspend the sanctions once the transfer takes place. Montasser also said that the sanctions would be lifted per-

manently after 90 days if Annan reports to the Security Council that Libya has complied fully with its demands.

But this would take another vote by the Security Council after Annan's report. Libya's wording, however, indicates it may have received private assurances from Washington and London that neither country would prolong the sanctions.

One potential stumbling point in the letter was Libya's contention that the Security Council needed to adopt a resolution on its intentions and the arrangements "in a form binding on all concerned parties."

But Dorda insisted this was not a new Libyan condition but a request. "It is our wish," he said.

Last August, London and Washington dropped their insistence of a trial in either of their countries and agreed to one in the Netherlands before a Scottish judge, under Scottish law in accordance with Libya's oft-stated willingness to accept a trial in a "neutral" venue.

Since then Libya has been seeking clarifications and guarantees on details such as where the men would serve any sentences and when the United Nations would lift sanctions.



St. Patrick's Day reveler blows away slow-flushing toilet

SCHERERVILLE (AP) — An intoxicated man angered by a slow-flushing toilet at a restaurant shot it to pieces with his semi-automatic handgun after a night of St. Patrick's Day reveling. "He told investigators the toilet didn't flush fast enough for him, so he fired it up. No one was injured. Fortunately, he was in the bathroom by himself. He was highly intoxicated," Detective Sgt. Michael Ison said Friday. Raymond A. Cruz, 49, was arrested after the incident early Thursday morning.

Vintner quits producing 'Poor Man's Viagra'

BUCHAREST (AP) — A Romanian wine company has abandoned its anti-impotence product called "Poor Man's Viagra" to avoid prosecution by makers of the original Viagra drug, the company head said Saturday. It was sold at a price low enough to undercut competition and was recommended for men. Authorities clamped down late last year on producers of false Viagra pills which promised "to multiply by five your sexual potency" — but which turn out to be chewing gum. The pills came in small cardboard boxes with instructions in Romanian to "chew slowly, preferably in the presence of your partner."

Foreigners face blacklist for public sex on Thai isle

BANGKOK (AP) — Authorities in the southern Thai beach resort of Phuket will seek to have foreign tourists who have sex in public kicked out of the country and barred from returning, a police official said Saturday. Province governor Chadej Inswang ordered police on Thursday to keep a close watch to make sure that tourists are not having sex on the island's beaches, said Maj. Gen. Anond Kamolrat, head of Phuket's tourist police. Anond did not say why the crackdown was ordered at this time. He said police had never seen any tourists making love on the beach.

Man wants son's innocence back, and \$3 million

CHARLESTON (AP) — A man is suing Penthouse magazine for \$3 million, alleging the magazine robbed his 13-year-old son of his innocence. Charles Barefield of Dunbar filed the lawsuit Wednesday, saying his son was solicited by Penthouse and other adult magazines to subscribe. "I don't know how they got his name or how they signed him up. It's just amazing to me," Barefield said. Barefield contacted the state attorney general and got an apology from Penthouse after school officials confiscated a Duffel bag full of magazines from his son in October. "That's fine that they apologized and stopped sending the magazines, but that's not enough," he said.

Displaced alligator dines on pets

RIO DE JANEIRO (R) — A 79-kg alligator pushed out of its natural feeding grounds by development in Rio de Janeiro has resorted to dining on local pets, authorities said. The voracious reptile invaded a home near a swampy nature park and gulped down the owner's dog, along with four chickens that were in the yard, police said. It took four officers from Rio's environment patrol squad 30 minutes to subdue the alligator. They were able to wrestle the reptile onto a stretcher and ship it unharmed to a zoo. "It's inevitable that this happens. The city is encroaching on the habitat of the alligators. They end up leaving the Lagoa (swamp) because of the annoyances or for lack of food," said Rio Zoo Foundation President Marcio Martins.

King's men
Cotton - 21.7

Setters train
houses in Arith
east Jerusalem

Russia charmed
bikers through
offshore bank

Explosion stops
Iraq-Turkey pipeline

Planes carrying 15
reported missing

NEWS IN BRIEF

Israel threatens to boycott truce panel

TEL AVIV (AP) — Israel has threatened to boycott the international panel monitoring the 1996 truce agreement in south Lebanon, in protest at the behaviour of its Lebanese members, public radio reported on Saturday. The radio quoted Israeli officials as charging that the Lebanese side had refused to examine evidence that a munitions dump had been set up in the village of Armonj just outside the Israeli-occupied border strip of southern Lebanon. "The behaviour of the Lebanese delegation meant that the committee refused to address the facts as presented by the Israeli side. It could put an end to the activities of the committee," said an official quoted by the radio. The international committee monitoring the ceasefire met at Naqura, the U.N. headquarters in the south of Lebanon, on Wednesday to examine five complaints put forward by Lebanon and Israel. Among its complaints, Lebanon accused Israel of blowing up three houses in Armonj, in violation of the truce agreement which bans attacks on civilians. For its part the Israeli side charged that the explosives dump in Armonj constituted a violation of the ceasefire arrangements, which forbid the use of civilian areas for launching attacks.

Hamas denies contact with Israel

CAIRO (AP) — The Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, on Saturday denied any contact between its prisoners held in Israel and Israeli security officials in the prisons. "There is no basis to a claim by Palestinian Authority officials about the existence of a letter sent by the prisoners to the Hamas leadership dealing with contacts with the enemy," a Hamas official said in a statement sent to AFP. "The internal and external Hamas leadership has received no letter of this sort from the prisoners and what was published is the kind of libel that is usual with the Palestinian Authority," it said. Palestinian security officials said Friday that the PNA's efforts to negotiate with Hamas to halt anti-Israeli attacks have been hindered by what they said were direct contacts between Israel and Hamas. The contacts were made recently between Hamas members detained in Israel and Israeli security officials in the prisons, they said. The Palestinian security officials said they found a letter from prisoners to Hamas leaders abroad on a Hamas messenger last week.

Mubarak meets Kuwaiti emir

KUWAIT CITY (AP) — Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak held talks here Saturday with Kuwait's emir on the Iraq crisis and its impact on the Arab World, the official news agency KUNA said. It said the talks between Sheikh Jaber Al Ahmad Al Sabah and the Egyptian leader, who was on a brief visit to the emirate, also covered the stalled Middle East peace process and bilateral ties. The visit came two days after Arab League foreign ministers, at a meeting in Cairo, fell short of calling for a halt to the almost U.S. and British air strikes in no-fly zones over southern and northern Iraq. Instead, they urged a "halt to practices to which Iraq is submitted outside U.N. Security Council resolutions on the matter."

Saudi FM visits Yemen

SANAA (AP) — Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al Faisal arrived here on Saturday to deliver a message from King Fahd to Yemeni President Ali Abdullah Saleh on a longstanding border dispute, the official Yemeni news agency SABA said. Prince Saud told SABA that the visit was a follow-up to Yemeni Foreign Minister Abdul Qader Bajammal's trip to Riyadh in February. At the time, diplomatic sources said Bajammal intervened because of differences that had arisen between the two sides. In contrast, Prince Saud himself said the talks had "progressed well." Saudi Arabia and Yemen have been discussing the demarcation of their common land and sea borders since 1995, but the negotiations have so far failed to produce results.

Emir names son as army chief

MANAMA (AP) — The new emir, Sheikh Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifeh, on Saturday named his eldest son, Crown Prince Salman, as commander of the Bahraini Defence Force, the official news agency GNA said. It said the appointment was announced during a visit by Sheikh Hamad to the headquarters of the 11,000-strong force. Sheikh Salman, 29, was named crown prince in place of his father following the death of the emir, Sheikh Isa Ben Salman Al Khalifeh, of a heart attack on March 6. The new crown prince, who studied at universities in the United States and England, has served as undersecretary at the defence ministry since 1995.

Suicide bomber wounds three in Turkey

ISTANBUL (Agencies) — A suicide-bomber believed to be a Kurdish rebel blew himself up outside a police station in southeastern Turkey on Saturday, killing himself and wounding two policemen who tried to stop him.

The blast in the province of Van also injured a passer-by. None of the injuries were serious.

In the province of Simak, police stopped and arrested a female rebel before she was able to detonate two grenades strapped to her body, the Anatolia news agency said.

Meanwhile, Turkish police shot one person dead in Istanbul during searches designed to halt a spate of bombings that has recently hit the city, the NTV news channel reported Saturday.

The report said that the incident in the city's Merter district on the European side occurred late Friday when the victim refused a police call to stop and opened fire.

A hand grenade and a gun were found on the unidentified victim's body, NTV said.

Police were continuing their investigations, it added. A similar shootout took place in the city on Wednesday, when police killed a man who refused to be searched and fired shots at the police. Officers discovered two sticks of dynamite, two hand grenades and a gun on the man's body.

Security has been heightened throughout Turkey after a series of attacks blamed on Kurdish rebels seeking to avenge the capture of their leader, Abdullah Ocalan.

Police have been told to be especially vigilant on the eve of Sunday's annual spring festival celebrated by Kurds, which in the past has been the occasion of violent riots.

Kevorkian faces U.S. murder trial for first time

DETROIT (R) — After helping at least 130 people kill themselves in the past nine years in a brazen right-to-die crusade, retired pathologist Jack Kevorkian will go on trial on Monday for murder for the first time.

Jury selection is scheduled to begin in Oakland County Circuit Court in Pontiac, Michigan, in Kevorkian's trial on first-degree murder charges stemming from the alleged mercy killing of a terminally ill man last September. Kevorkian intends to defend himself with the assistance of four lawyers.

It is a confrontation the 70-year-old assisted suicide activist went out of his way to provoke. His goal was to spark a final showdown in court over the legality

of assisted suicide and advance his cause to allow active euthanasia.

After giving Thomas Youk, 52, of Waterford Township, Michigan, a lethal dose of drugs, Kevorkian contacted the CBS news programme "60 Minutes" and sent the show a videotape of his actions. The tape was broadcast nationally in November, causing a storm of protest.

The Youk case marks the fifth time in five years Kevorkian has faced a trial triggered by an assisted suicide. Detroit-area juries have acquitted him three times; the fourth ended in a mistrial.

This trial has many familiar faces. Both the judge and prosecutor are the same as in the second trial three years ago. But there are key differences. Absent is

Geoffrey Fieger, the flamboyant, bullying, sharp-tongued defence attorney who kept Kevorkian out of jail for years.

And there is the 18-minute videotape. As Kevorkian narrates, he can be seen giving the wheelchair-bound Youk, who suffered from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, or Lou Gehrig's disease, three injections.

"You killed him?" asked reporter Mike Wallace on "60 Minutes."

"I did," replied Kevorkian.

Kevorkian added: "This could never be a crime in any society that deems itself enlightened."

Legal analysts agree the case hinges on what kind of jurors are selected. Prosecutors, in a strategic gamble, dropped the charge of violating Michigan's assisted suicide ban. The aim was to block Kevorkian from introducing emotional defence testimony about Youk's daily living ordeals that included difficulty breathing and swallowing.

That means Kevorkian is charged with first-degree murder and delivering a controlled substance. The murder charge carries a penalty of life in prison without parole. The other charge is punishable by up to seven years in prison.

"Kevorkian's victory depends on getting people on the jury that have, and will act upon, those feelings enough to overcome the effect of the evidence of first-degree murder," said University of Detroit Mercy Law Professor Patrick Keenan.